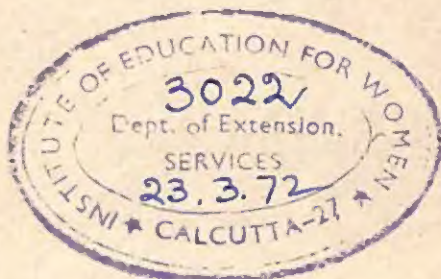


# TRENDS IN SHAKESPEARIAN CRITICISM

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
PROFESSOR GEOFFREY TILLOTSON  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



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To  
PROFESSOR AMALENDU BOSE  
*My Guide and Philosopher*



## Foreword

Few scholars and critics failed to respond to the opportunity provided by 1964 of saying something in praise of Shakespeare, who had been born 400 years before, and whose fame goes from strength to strength. They all had something to say, and their successors will be inspired by what they have said to say something else, and if possible something better. No doubt all of them had something new to say, nor can we imagine a time when Shakespeare criticism will be bankrupt. The reason for his perennial challenge to critics is plain. Matthew Arnold put it neatly when he exclaimed 'Shakespeare... You are as obscure as life is.' We can apply to Shakespeare what Pope said of Virgil—that when he went to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* for inspiration, "*Nature and Homer were, he found, the same*". When we go back to Shakespeare we find him interpreting and ratifying human life for us.

And how many hundred times more detail about nature (both external and human nature) is there in Shakespeare than in Homer, and even in Virgil. A modern classical scholar has said that whereas we go back to Virgil to find something new, we go back to Homer to re-experience the delight he gave us before. Shakespeare is more like Virgil in this than he is like Homer, and again how much more is there to be found in him even than in Virgil. Tennyson said that Shakespeare, the older we grow and the more we know of life, gets more and more mysteriously great.

Critics have felt themselves to be on their mettle when trying to criticise him. And they have accordingly been inspired to some of their best work—Shakespeare has proved not only witty in himself but the cause that wit is in other men. What they say of Shakespeare shows us vividly what they themselves are. It also tells us what the age was looking for in literature, and how wide or deep its sympathies. If the critics had attended to what Pope, Gray and Johnson said of Shakespeare, they would have understood eighteenth-century literature better—Pope said his plays were like a



## *Preface to the Second Edition*

I am glad to have the opportunity to write a preface to the Second edition of *Trends in Shakespearian Criticism*. Students and teachers of the Indian Universities have warmly received the book, and I place on record my sincere gratitude to them. Professor G. Wilson Knight has, to quote his own words, "offered a brief salute" to my humble venture and made appreciative references to it in his *Shakespeare and Religion*. The Second edition, it may be noted, is not a mere reprint of the first. I felt the need to offer as much as could be presented in intelligible form the huge body of Shakespearian scholarship and criticism of the last three centuries. To that end I have made certain additions, which, I suppose, have considerably enriched the book. In deference to the wishes of several friends I have also given an index to the Volume, which, I believe, will be of immense help to the serious readers.

July 1, 1970

North Bengal University

S. P. SENGUPTA

## *Preface to the First Edition*

A new venture into Shakespearian Criticism is an act of courage or of mere effrontery. I was therefore reluctant to bind myself to a task for which my reading was inadequate. I confess to having invaded the territories of specialists without specialist equipment. Perhaps a Saintsbury could have done full justice to a colossal subject like Shakespearian Criticism. Yet the subject was to me one of absorbing interest. I read most of the books on the subject available in India. It was then quite a job to sift the materials, and I could not see the wood for the trees. I was faced with a difficulty which it is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. I had, however, the advantage—how great I alone can estimate—of Dr. A. Bose's prodigious knowledge of the subject. His erudition and scintillating mind have saved me a number of lamentable blunders. For he knows his Shakespeare as well as a Bishop knows his Bible. With Dr. Bose as my guide I have had quite a pretty plain sailing. His unceasing interest, advice and encouragement made the completion of the work possible.

Shakespeare today has crossed the geographical boundaries and national frontiers. He is now the noblest spiritual heritage of man. The death-knell of the British imperialism has been rung. Shakespeare's empire, however, is widening with the passage of time. He was once reformed, refined and even denigrated. But now we have him in correct perspective. The warm reception of



Shakespeare today by even the non-English speaking countries is the warmest tribute to the universal portrait of man depicted by Shakespeare in his poetry and drama. I have sought to trace Shakespeare's cult in various ages. I have also given a detailed account of Shakespeare's entrances and exits. The present work is a synoptic survey of the history of Shakespearian Criticism. Students and the general readers who normally do not have an access to the original works on Shakespeare will find large extracts quoted from them. The principal object of the book is to furnish the student the most important trends of Shakespearian Criticism, reduced to a few pages. For Ralli's volumes, a rich mine of attractive information as they are, often appear unwieldy. Without scholarly pretensions, and I do not claim to be a Shakespearian Scholar, I have tried to present Shakespeare cult from the common reader's point of view and incorporated the critical comments of the eminent critics. Many of the works on Shakespeare have become bibliographical treasures today, and I have sought to dig up the past and present the buried treasures to the curious readers.

My principal obligation, a considerable one, is to my teacher Dr. A. Bose, and I gratefully acknowledge it here. My thanks are also due to my teacher Prof. T. N. Sen, whose profound knowledge of the subject I have freely and substantially drawn upon. Other scholars like Prof. P. K. Guha and Dr. R. K. Das Gupta have helped me in ways which are too various to specify. For my use of quotations from various sources I record my indebtedness and gratitude to the authors and publishers. I am particularly grateful to F. E. Halliday, G. B. Harrison, C. H. Herford, Kenneth Muir, D. Nichol Smith, A. Ralli, Granville—Barker, G. Wilson Knight, L. C. Knights, A. C. Bradley, H. B. Charlton, Lily Campbell, Anne Ridler, T. S. Eliot, A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, R. B. Mckerrow, Dover Wilson, E. K. Chambers, Sidney Lee, J. W. H. Atkins, Rene Wellek and George Saintsbury, whose learned works have been my constant guides. I am perpetually in the debt of Professor Geoffrey Tillotson, who has been my teacher, guide and philosopher. Words fail me to express my gratitude to him for his kind Foreword to my work. I should also express my heartfelt thanks to my publishers Mr. D. Chatterjee and Mr. B. Chatterjee who have all along shown lively interest in my humble but sincere tribute to Shakespeare.

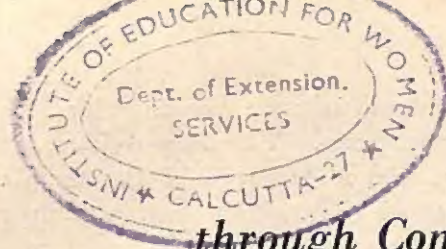
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S. P. SENGUPTA

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## Shakespeare through Contemporary Eyes

No man can be a hero to his valet. Nor can any writer be a hero to his contemporaries. "A poet's contemporaries and his fellow countrymen," said Croce, "are not good judges of his poetry." It is distance that lends enchantment to the view. Shakespeare has been invested with glory almost bordering on worship for the last three hundred years. Bardolatry began only after Shakespeare had reached the end of his journey. For a while he was denigrated and, at times, only tolerated. In the 17th century D'avenant reformed Shakespeare's plays. Dryden had refined him. Nahum Tate effected some emendations. But they had all profound reverence for the favoured child of the Muses. To-day idolatry and denigration alike have died away. We have him now in correct perspective.

Robert Greene was the first man to refer to Shakespeare in his *A Groatsworth of Wit Bought With a Million of Repentance*, a vigorous autobiographical prose document. This autobiography appeared in September, 1592, when Shakespeare had written only *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and the three parts of *Henry VI*. Greene was then at the height of his fame. The autobiography of Greene ends with an address to the contemporary playwrights, Marlowe, Lodge and Peele, all University wits, exhorting them to give up play writing; for, "there is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute 'Johannes Factotum,' is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country." Shakespeare's *Henry I* appeared in 1592, a few months before the publication of 'Groatsworth.' Greene must have parodied Shakespeare's *O, tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide* (*Henry VI*, 111, 1. 4. 137). 'Shake-scene' obviously refers to Shakespeare himself. The clause 'beautified with our feathers' does not, of course, charge Shakespeare with plagiarism. But it does mean that Shakespeare's



early plays were the adaptations from the works of his illustrious predecessors and contemporaries. *The Comedy of Errors* is an improvement upon Plautus. Some critics hold that the play is also an adaptation of *The Historie of Error* that was published in 1576. For his *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Shakespeare was indebted to both Lyly and Greene. From Lyly Shakespeare must have learnt the symmetrical balancing of structure. To Greene he owed a little more. Greene was a master in the art of delineation of English womanhood. Nashe presumably did not exaggerate when he said that Greene was the 'Homer of Women.' Shakespeare had substantially drawn upon Greene's art in his delineation of Julia's character. Another aspect of Greene's dramatic technique was also liberally put under contribution. In most of his plays Greene had interspersed blank verse with rhymed couplets. Shakespeare borrowed the trick and touched it to a successful issue. Lyly exercised the greatest influence on *Love's Labour's Lost*. Don Armado and Moth are the carbon copies of Lyly's Sir Tophas and Epiton. The dialogue in the Shakespearian play is also a close imitation of Lyly's style.

Critics like Ward, Schelling, Herford, Sir Sidney Lee, Coleridge and Gervinus agree that the first part of *Henry VI*, fathered as it is on Shakespeare, was not written by the master. Greene, Marlowe or Peele must have had a hand in it. 'The first part of the contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster' in the second part of *Henry VI* is also probably written by Marlowe in collaboration with some playwrights, including Shakespeare. In all fairness it may be urged that *Henry VI* is a revision of the existing plays. All this, Greene thought, substantiated his contention that Shakespeare was 'beautified with our feathers.' In the Elizabethan age collaboration was a common practice. University wits often worked together in harmony. The following entry in *Henslowe's Diary* will bear out our contention.

"March 1598—*Earl Goodwin and His Three Sons*, by Drayton, Chettle, Dekker and Wilson." Closet dramas were not written at all. Producers, managers and playwrights wanted to promote and quicken dramatic production to cater to the play-hungry age. Polonius in *Hamlet* asked his son to be 'neither a lender, nor a borrower.' Shakespeare, however, was both a borrower and a lender. Greene's contention, therefore, may be true only to some extent, but his language has been the height of impropriety.



Shakespeare, it is true, did not start his career amid a fanfare. But reparations for the damage done to Shakespeare's reputation were soon to follow. Henry Chettle, though a printer for some time, was a dramatist of considerable distinction. We have it on Henslowe's authority that he had collaborated in forty-eight plays. His views, therefore, should not be dismissed as those of a mere unlettered printer. Chettle had some responsibility in publishing Greene's vituperation. Only three months after that publication appeared Chettle's apology for Greene's unmerited attack on Shakespeare in his 'Epistle to Kind-Hart's Dream Concerning Five Apparitions with Their Invectives against Abuses Reigning.' Chettle wrote :

"I am as sorry as if the original fault had been my fault, because myself have seen his demeanour no less civil than he excelled in the quality he professes : Besides, diverse of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art."

Shakespeare was undoubtedly left on a firm but small pedestal.

Francis Meres, a school master of an English school, wrote *Palladis Tamia : Wit's Treasury* in 1598. It contained the "comparative discourse of our English poets with the Greek, Latin and Italian poets." Meres unhesitatingly characterised Shakespeare as the best writer of comedy and tragedy in English. In 1598 very few of the mature tragedies, on which Shakespeare's claim to immortality rests, were written. The various strands of his genius were not drawn together. The great tragedies were yet to be written. But Meres could make a correct appraisal even then. He wrote :

"As the soul of *Enphorbus* was thought to live in Pythagoras : So the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare ; witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared sonnets among his private friends, etc.

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins : So Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage ; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Comedy of Errors*, his *Love's Labour's Lost*, his *Love's Labour Won*, his *Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, and his *Merchant of Venice* ; for tragedy his *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Juliet*.

As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speak Latin : So I say that the Muses



would speak with Shakespeare's fine-filed phrase, if they would speak English.....

As Pindarus, Anacreon and Callimachus among the Greek (sic) and Horace and Catullus among the Latins are the best lyric poets, so in this faculty the best among our poets are Spencer (sic) (who excelleth in all kinds), Daniel, Drayton, Shakespeare, Bretton.....

These are our best for tragedy, the Lord Buckhurst, Doctor Leg. of Cambridge, Doctor Edes of Oxford, Master Edward Ferris, the author of the *Mirror for Magistrates*, Marlowe, Peele, Watson, Kyd, Shakespeare, Drayton, Chapman, Dekker, and Benjamin Jonson.

The best for comedy amongst us be, Edward, Earl of Oxford, Doctor Gager of Oxford, Master Rowley, once a rare scholar of learned Pembroke Hall in Cambridge, Master Edwards, one of Her Majesty's Chapel, eloquent and witty John Lyly, Lodge Gascoigne, Greene, Shakespeare, Thomas Nash, Thomas Heywood, Anthony Mundy, our best plotter, Chapman, Porter, Wilson, Hathway and Henry Chettle."

Meres referred to a good number of tragic and comic dramatists and lyrists, who are now lost in oblivion. But his warm appreciation considerably advanced Shakespeare's reputation. Greene is popularly regarded as the father of Romantic Comedy. But Meres offered the palm to Shakespeare when he said that he was "the most passionate among us to bewail and bemoan the perplexities of love."

Richard Barnfield was a poet who modelled his works on Shakespeare's. On a comparative study it will appear that *Venus and Adonis* and the sonnets profoundly influenced him. Barnfield in his volume of verse, *The Encomium of Lady Pecunia* wrote :

And Shakespeare thou, whose honey-flowing vein  
(Pleasing the world) they praises doth obtain,  
Whose *Venus*, and whose *Lucrece* (sweet and chaste)  
Thy name in Fame's immortal book have placed.  
Live ever you, at least in Fame live ever :  
Well may the body die, but fame dies never.

It was not merely the homage of a pupil to his master. It was, in fact, the appraisal of a poet by a fellow poet. Was it not an eminent critic who said that a poet could be appreciated only by a poet ? And Barnfield was a poet who must have contributed some poems to Shakespeare's *Passionate Pilgrim*.

In the late nineties, quite a few persons left records of their having been to the plays of Shakespeare. They, however, did not record their impressions. The German travellers Platter and John Manningham were among them. In the absence of any adverse comments we feel tempted to believe that the plays did not leave them cold.

John Weever was a poet of some distinction. He paid his warm tribute to Shakespeare in 1599 in his sonnet 'Epigrams in the Oldest Cut, and Newest Fashion.' Weever referred only to Shakespeare's poetry and characterised him as "honey-tongued Shakespeare." He rhapsodised over the poems and declared that Apollo alone could write them.

In another book—*The Mirror of Martyrs*—Weever made a reference to *Julius Caesar*, without being rapturous. He referred to the eloquence of Antony. That was, in effect, a warm tribute to Shakespeare's inimitable style—the style which, like the magic wand of Prospero, could work miracles.

An anonymous trilogy of plays known as *Parnassus*, sometimes attributed to John Day, sometimes to Dodd, was staged by the students of Cambridge in 1598, 1599 and 1601. In the third part of *Parnassus* a character, named Gullio, went into raptures while quoting from *Venus and Adonis* and said: "Let this duncified world esteem of Spenser and Chaucer; I'll worship sweet Mr. Shakespeare and to honour him will lay his *Venus and Adonis* under my pillow."

Gullio also expressed his desire to "have his [Shakespeare's] picture in my study at the court." Let us hope Gullio was not a gull. His expression had all the exuberance of an under-graduate. But it pointed out how Shakespeare could completely capture the imagination of the teen-agers of Cambridge. The students of Cambridge were nurtured in the classics. Aristotle and Horace provided their intellectual pabulum. Yet one of the characters in *Parnassus* exclaimed:

"Few of the University men pen plays well, they smell too much of that writer Ovid; and that writer of *Metamorphosis*, and talk too much of Proserpina and Jupiter. Why here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all down, I and Ben Jonson too. O that Ben Jonson is a pestilent fellow, he brought up Horace, giving the poets a pill, but our fellow Shakespeare hath given him a purge that made him betray his credit." Kempe, the speaker,



threw his classics to the four winds and enthroned Shakespeare for his works which are but the quintessence of romance.

Gabriel Harvey, the closest friend of Edmund Spenser, "the poet's poet," was not as ecstatic about Shakespeare as the Cambridge under-graduates. In the mellow autumn of his life, when man grows cynical and disdains all kinds of exuberance as puerile, Harvey wrote in his personal copy of Speght's edition of Chaucer :

"The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* : but his *Lucrece* and his tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* have it in them, to please the wiser sort."

What, in essence, Harvey wanted to say was that Shakespeare could cater to all, old and young alike.

Anthony Scoloker, whose fame as a poet rests on *Daiphantus or the Passions of Love*, wrote eloquently about Shakespeare in both the Epistle and the volume itself. In the Epistle he testified to the popularity of *Hamlet*. In his volume of verse he wrote :

"It should be like the never-too-well-read *Arcadia*, where the prose and verse (matter and words) are like his mistress's eyes, one still excelling another and without co-rival : or to come home to the vulgar element, like Friendly Shakespeare's Tragedies, where the *Comedian* rides, when the *Tragedian* stands on tiptoe ; Faith, it should please all, like Prince Hamlet."

John Webster, the greatest tragic dramatist after Shakespeare and whom Swinburne considered a greater genius than even Marlowe, recorded his impressions about all his contemporaries. Not a brash critic like Greene, he had the critical acumen to find something commendable in all their writings. In his Epistle to *The White Devil*, published in 1612, Webster praised Chapman for his "full and heightened style," Jonson for his "labour and understanding," and Beaumont and Fletcher for their "worthy composures." He went into rhapsody over Shakespeare, Dekker and Heywood and observed :

"And lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of M. Shakespeare, M. Dekker, and M. Heywood."

Webster almost invoked the spirit of these three guides and wished to read and write "by their light."

Thomas Freeman, an epigrammatist, wrote a sonnet, "To Master W. Shakespeare," in his *Runne and a Great Cast* (1614). As a sonnet, it certainly does not deserve any mention. In fact, it is

extremely wishy washy. But it does testify to his warm appreciation of Shakespeare's poetry. Shakespeare's brain was as swift as "nimble Mercury"; his poetry could, like a soothing balm, lull "Argus-eyes" to sleep; he had run up and down the gamut of the entire human experience; virtue and vice would both draw upon his poetry; and he would be a permanent treasure-trove for future generations.

English people, whatever they might be, are not hero-worshippers. Their writings are the confessions of an enquiring spirit. That is why the impressions of Shakespeare's contemporaries about the poet must not be dismissed as idolatry, with an oriental touch about it.





## *Ben Jonson as a Shakespearian Critic*

Ben Jonson is a classicist. Born in the Elizabethan period he broke into the romantic stronghold without apology. He had salutary things to say. And he said them provocatively. He had a distinct and definite programme of reform. In his prologues, prefaces, introductions and inductions he made sharp criticisms of contemporary drama. He was sick of the romantic extravagances. The improbable plots, impossible events, fantastic episodes and unnatural characterisation made him lose his patience. There was no law and order in the world of letters. The classical unities of time, place and action were jettisoned. Aristotle and Horace, Cicero and Quintilian seemed to have outlived their importance. Ben Jonson was visibly shocked at this utter disregard of the classical authorities. He harked back to the past and cast a longing lingering look behind. The Greek and the Roman masters were his models. Writers, he sincerely believed, should adhere to those models. Any deviation from them, to him, was anathema. "Fine Frenzy" of poetic inspiration had no appeal to him.

Jonson like Sidney detested any mixture of tragedy and comedy. He did not like to individualise his characters. The characters would be types. That is why it has often been said that the little finger of a Shakespearian Character has more blood in it than all the characters of Ben Jonson. Jonson was also a stern realist. Contemporary events in a contemporary setting, he maintained, lent themselves to better and more artistic dramatic treatment.

If intense realism is Jonson's achievement, the quintessence of romance is the hard core of Shakespearian dramas. Jonson is Shakespeare's typical antithesis. If Shakespeare was a genial friend of the playwrights, Jonson by his combativeness antagonised everybody. Drummond says about Jonson :

He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and Scornor of others, given rather to lose a friend than a jest, jealous

of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink which is one of the elements in which he liveth) a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well but what either he himself, or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done." Making allowance for exaggeration, if any, the fact remains that Jonson was highly irascible, and this irascible temperament accounts for his sarcastic references to many of his contemporary playwrights. Jonson spared none, not even Shakespeare. It is, however, on record that Shakespeare welcomed Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* for Chamberlain's company. Shakespeare himself was one of the actors in the play. On other occasions too Shakespeare advanced the interests of his younger contemporary. "Schiller," said Frank Harris, "held aloof; Goethe advanced and did all the kindness. It is always the greater who gives and forgives." Shakespeare gave and forgave. In the Mermaid Tavern Jonson was undeniably an honourable guest. Fuller in his *Worthies of England* records that "Many were the wit combats betwixt him [Shakespeare] and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a *Spanish Great Galleon* and an *English man of war*; Master Jonson (like the former) was built for higher in learning; *solid*, but *slow* in his performances. Shakespeare with the *English-man of war*, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention." Shakespeare was Jonson's friend. In fact, he was everybody's friend. He could not estrange any body. A few days before his death he enjoyed the company of Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton at Stratford-upon-Avon.

But the warmth of friendship did not blur Jonson's critical sense. The zeal of the reformer got the upper hand. Jonson claimed originality in his thinking, and his claims are based on truth. Amidst what he called the chaos and anarchy of the Elizabethan stage, Jonson wanted to bring law and order. He was a reformer. Shakespeare's Polonius advised his son to be neither a borrower nor a lender. But Shakespeare was both. He liberally borrowed from the accepted dramatic conventions of his age. Marlowe and Kyd, Greené and Lyly were his masters. At times Shakespeare did smart, but normally he resigned himself to the dramatic tradition with a smile. Shakespeare did not break with the tradition. Jonson did. He was an anachronism in his age. In his ideas, theories and tastes he was almost an



iconoclast. He was there to cause a flutter in the dovecote of the Elizabethan self-complacency.

Shakespeare was serving his apprenticeship while he modelled his earlier comedies on Plautus and Terence. Jonson remained a lifelong disciple of Plautus, Terence and Aristophanes. If genial sympathy is the predominant note of the Shakespearian comedy, satire and biting sarcasm is Jonson's *tour de force*. Shakespeare had his protean plasticity. And, therefore, he accepted the gold and the dross, beauty and ugliness.

This background is necessary for understanding Jonson as a Shakespearian critic. It is worthwhile to know Jonson's strictures on and eulogy of Shakespeare, before we analyse them critically. In the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson complained that "*Jeronimo or Andronicus are the best plays yet*." The rant and bombast and all other Senecan qualities of *Titus Andronicus* must have had popular appeal. Marlowe and Kyd were the rage of the day. And hence Jonson's complaint. In another part of the Induction, Jonson was very critical of both the *Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. "If there be never a servant-monster in the fair, who can help it, he says, nor a nest of antiques? He is too loth to make nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget tales, tempests, and such-like drolleries, to mix his head with other men's heels." In Jonson's opinion *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* are both drolleries, and Shakespeare by introducing dances, confused the different types of art. Shakespeare in his *Tempest* observed the unities of time, place and action. Yet he could not escape the scathing criticism of Jonson. In his "Ode to Himself," Jonson referred to *Pericles* and described it as a "mouldy tale." Yet it was not written in a spirit of criticism.

The prologue to *Every man in his Humour* is unmistakably a criticism of Shakespearian plays. According to Steevens, it is a "malicious sneer at Shakespeare."

"To make a child now Swaddled, to proceed  
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed,  
To fourscore years."

definitely refer to *The Winter's Tale*. Shakespeare's indifference to the unity of time comes in for adverse criticism.

Then again,

Or, with three rusty swords,  
And help of some few foot and half foot words,  
obviously refer to the hyphened epithets in *Richard III*.

"Fighter over York and Lancaster's longjars" refers to the three parts of *Henry VI*. The chorus of *Henry V* is referred to in

"Chorus wafts you o're the seas."

"Creaking throne comes down" refers to *Cymbeline*, where there is a reference to Jupiter descending on an eagle. "Tempestuous drum" may refer to the *Tempest* as well as *King Lear*. According to Davies it is *King Lear*.

If even the last plays of Shakespeare are referred to in some form or other in the Prologue to *Every Man in His Humour*, when was the play actually written? According to Gifford, *Every Man in His Humour* was written in 1596. And in 1596 *King Lear*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* were not written. The anomaly can be explained if we know that *Every Man in His Humour* appeared in two distinct forms. The second form was published in 1616.

In *Every Man out of His Humour*, Jonson referred to Julius Caesar. In his satirical comedy *The Poetaster*, Jonson was concerned with the quarrels of his contemporary poets and playwrights. Jonson is represented as Horace. Shakespeare is virgil. Dekker and Marston come in for bitter criticism, which they later avenged in *Satiromastix*.

The famous conversations of Ben Jonson with William Drummond of Howthornden are unique among the contemporary records of Jonson. There Ben Jonson is said to have told Drummond in 1619 that "Shakespeare wanted Art". In another passage Jonson said, "Shakespeare in a play brought in a number of men saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some 100 miles." *The Winter's Tale* here comes in for criticism for Shakespeare's lack of knowledge in Geography. In defence of Shakespeare it can only be said that he got the idea from Greene's *Pandosto*. In 1711 edition the two disconnected passages were dovetailed as follows: "Shakespeare wanted Art and sometimes sense; for in one of his plays he brought in a number of men etc., etc."

Man wars not with the dead. That is why in 1623 the poem of Jonson that was prefixed to the first folio of Shakespeare's works was an expression of unstinted love and adoration. The poem may be quoted at length, and it will appear even to a superficial observer that Jonson was placing on record his heartfelt devotion to the Elizabethan master.

To the memory of my beloved,

The Author



Mr. William Shakespeare :

And

What he hath left us.

To draw no envy (Shakespeare) on thy name,

Am I thus ample to thy book, and fame :

While I confess thy writings to be such,

As neither Man, nor Muse, can praise too much.

'Tis true, and all men's suffrage. But these ways

Were not the paths I meant unto thy praise :

For seeliest ignorance on these may light,

Which, when : It sounds at best, but echo's right ;

Or blind affection, which doth ne're advance

The truth, but gropes, and urgeth all by chance ;

Or crafty Malice, might pretend this praise,

And think to ruin, where it seemed to raise.

These are, as some infamous Bawd, or whore,

Should praise a Matron. What could hurt her more ?

But thou art proof against them, and indeed

Above th' ill fortune of them, or the need.

I, therefore, will begin. Soul of the Age !

The applause ! delight ! the wonder of our stage !

My *Shakespeare*, rise, I will not lodge thee by

*Chaucer*, or *Spenser*, or bid *Beaumont* lie

A little further, to make thee a room ;

Thou art a monument, without a tomb,

And art alive still, while thy Book doth live,

And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

That I not mix thee so, my brain excuses ;

I mean with great, but disproportioned *Muses* ;

For, if I thought my judgment were of years,

I should commit thee surely with thy peers,

And tell, how far thou ; didst our Lily outshine,

Or sporting *Kid*, or *Marlowe's* mighty line.

And though thou hadst small *Latine* and less *Greeke*,

From thence to honour thee, I would not seek

For names ; but call forth thund'ring *Aeschylus*.

*Euripides*, and *Sophocles* to us,

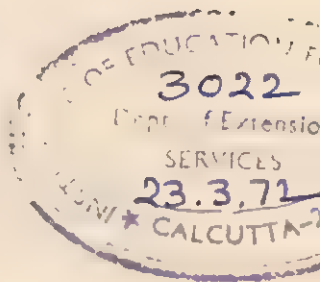
*Paccunius*, *Accius*, him of *Cordona* dead,

To life again, to hear thy buskin tread,

And shake a stage : or, why thy socks were on,

Leave thee alone, for the Comparison

Of all, that insolent *Greece*, or haughty *Rome*  
 Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come,  
 Triumph, my *Britain*, thou hast one to show,  
 To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe,  
 He was not of an age, but for all time !  
 And all the *Muses* still were in their prime,  
 When like *Apollo* he came forth to warm—  
 Our ears, or like a *Mercury* to charm !  
 Nature herself was proud of his designs,  
 And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines !  
 Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,  
 As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.  
 The merry *Greek*, tart *Aristophanes*  
 Neat *Terence*, witty *Plautus*, now not please ;  
 But antiquated, and deserted lie  
 As they were not of Nature's family.  
 Yet must I not give Nature all : Thy Art,  
 My gentle *Shakespeare*, must enjoy a part.  
 For though the poets matter, Nature be,  
 His Art doth give the fashion. And, that he,  
 Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,  
 (Such as thine are) and strike the second heat  
 Upon the *Muses'* anvil : turn the same,  
 (And himself with it) that he thinks to frame ;  
 Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,  
 For a good *poet's* made, as well as born.  
 And such wert thou. Look how the father's face—  
 Lives in his issue ; even so, the race  
 Of *Shakespeare's* mind, and manners brightly shines  
 In his well turned, and true-filed lines :  
 In each of which, he seems to shake a lance,  
 As brandish't at the eyes of Ignorance,  
 Sweet Swan of Avon ! What a sight it were  
 To see thee in our water yet appear,  
 And make those flights upon the bucks of *Thames*,  
 That so did *Eliza*, and our *James* !  
 But stay, I see thee in the *hemisphere*  
 Advanc'd, and made a constellation there !  
 Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage,  
 Or influence, chide, or cheer the drooping stage ;  
 Which, since thy flight from hence, hath mourn'd like night,  
 And despairs day, but for thy volumes light.





The whole poem seems to be a series of adjectives in the superlative degree. Only a Swinburne or a Carlyle could have paid such effusive tributes. Jonson unhesitatingly called Shakespeare the "Soul of the age". Shakespeare was greater than Kyd, Lyly and even Marlowe. Chaucer and Spenser were his inferiors. So far so good. Shakespeare, the romantic poet compares favourably with the fellow romantics. But when Jonson said that Shakespeare was in no way inferior to Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides the favoured children of Melpomene, the muse of Tragedy, the classicist Jonson seemed demonstrably to have suspended his critical faculty. Aristophanes, Plautus and Terence also claim no superiority to the Elizabethan Titan. It is as if golden Apollo is paying his homage to Shakespeare. Read out of context, Shakespeare's "small Latine and less Greek" is sufficiently damaging. But no attempt to denigrate Shakespeare is there. In fact, it is a warmer tribute to Shakespeare. For in spite of his lack of academic distinctions and scholarly attainment Shakespeare became a poet "not of an age, but for all time", through sheer genius. The poem was a public commendation, and, therefore, it was apparently all praise and no sermon. T. S. Eliot, critical of Milton as he was, spoke eloquently about Milton in his *British Academy Lecture*. But was the poem of Ben Jonson all praise? Perhaps not. In the stately Ceremonial verse he said :

"Yet must I not give nature all : Thy Art,  
My gentle *Shakespeare*, must enjoy a part.  
For though the *poets* matter, Nature be,  
His Art doth give the fashion."

Shakespeare had all the bountiful gifts from Nature. But "Nature" must be supplemented by "Art". No artistic perfection is possible without "Art". The poet "must sweat"; he must "strike the second heat upon the Muses' anvil". "A good poet's made, as well as born". Shakespeare is a born poet, but in order to attain perfection he has to serve his apprenticeship "upon the Muses' anvil". This explains the abrupt stricture of Jonson on Shakespeare that he "wanted art". Nature is excellent, but Art is the perfection of Nature.

Jonson's praise of Shakespeare in the poem, prefixed to the Folio Edition and his stricture on the poem in *Timber* or, *Descove-*

*Trends in Shakespearean Criticism*

ries, published in 1640 are, therefore, not irreconcilable. In the sixty fourth section of *Timber*, Jonson wrote :

“De Shakespeare Nostrati.

I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, would he had blotted a thousand which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this ; but for this ignorance, who choose that circumstance to command their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justify my own candour, (for I lov'd the man and do honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any). He was (indeed) honest, and of an open and free nature ; had an excellent phantasie (sic) ; brave notions, and gentle expressions : wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped : ‘*Sufflaminadus erat,*’ as *Augustus* said of *Haterius*. His wit was in his own power ; would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter : as when he said in the person of *Caesar*, one speaking to him ; ‘*Caesar, thou dost me wrong.*’ He replied, ‘*Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause,*’ and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices, with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised, than to be pardoned.”

This passage is, therefore, a continuation of the poem. Heminge and Condell, Shakespeare’s fellow-actors, are credited with having published the first folio edition of Shakespeare’s works. In the preface they wrote :

“Who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together. And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers.” Jonson recorded his protest against the self-complacency of Heminge and Condell. Shakespeare, he asserted, would have done well if he had “blotted a thousand.” Trying to rise above all passions and prejudices, Jonson presented a balanced view. “He loved the man and honours his memory”, yet he was not too subjective in his criticism of Shakespeare.

Jonson was not pleased with Shakespeare’s romantic extravagance and lack of restraint. On an analysis of the poem, prefixed to the folio edition, which is verse criticism of a fine intellect, it will appear that it is a correct judicial estimate of Shakespeare



strictly from the classical point of view. He stated the position of Shakespeare in the history of poetry and drama. Even when compared with the tragedians of antiquity Shakespeare emerged with credit. Shakespeare's reputation would not be confined to the shores of Albion. Other poets have purely ephemeral appeal. Shakespeare was superior to them, because of his universality. "He was not of an age but for all time." Shakespeare will have his appeal to all ages, and all nations. Amidst the universal hallelujah on the occasion of the Quater. Centenary of Shakespeare's birth, the truth of Jonson's criticism has been weighed in the balance, and not found wanting. Jonson's criticism is not merely the pious obligations of memorial verses, which sentimentalise the dead, but never speak the truth. Jonson for the time being threw off the Classical yardstick, and reacted to Shakespeare only as an aesthete, as one who seeks beauty and gratefully acknowledges wherever he finds it. Were Jonson a romantic poet, his praise would be interpreted as the fulsome adoration of a fellow-romantic, and his adverse strictures would be regarded as an expression of a jealous and bitter contemporary.

In the *Discoveries* the gravamen of the charge against Shakespeare is his facility of style. Were Shakespeare less facile it would have been better. Jonson found many Shakespearian passages simply ridiculous. The passage quoted from *Julius Caesar*, however, can by no stretch of imagination be called ridiculous. But Jonson was so much amused at the passage that he parodied it in the Induction of *The Staple of News*. To cater to the Elizabethan groundlings Shakespeare often had to write almost in unseemly haste. That might account for some of the obscurities in his plays. Shakespeare had his inspiration, but mere inspiration, according to Jonson, was not enough. Perspiration was of equal importance. Shakespeare, Jonson, complained, did not care to chisel his style. A man of Shakespeare's extraordinary genius failed in this respect only because he was in a tearing hurry. He had no time to ponder and reflect. Jonson compared himself with Augustus and Shakespeare with Haterius. Haterius was an orator of Rome, and he had eloquence but no restraint. *Haterius noster sufflaminandus* means that our friend Haterius should have his glib tongue bridled. Jonson cannot claim any originality in this criticism. For Seneca the Elder in his *controversiae* advised Haterius to learn the art of self-control.

Jonson was the most important contemporary critic of Shakes-

peare. Greene's animadversions cannot be called criticism. Heminge, Condell and Francis Meres were so very effusive in their expression that they are also not critics worth the name. Entirely different from Shakespeare in tastes, ideas and theories, Jonson's criticism is worthy of serious consideration. Unqualified praise is as harmful as unqualified denunciation. The function of a critic is that of a torch-bearer. Jonson is a torch-bearer. He unhesitatingly declared that Shakespeare had a wonderful creative faculty. And is there any artist, however extraordinary, completely free from defects? The defects are mainly as follows. The Renaissance ushered in a new era. A gentleman worth the name must have at least a smattering in Latin and Greek. And Shakespeare had small Latin and less Greek. T. W. Baldwin in his massive volumes *William Shakespeare's small Latine and less Greeke* has cited about sixty Latin and Greek authors with whom Shakespeare had a thorough acquaintance. But that is a different story. Shakespeare in Jonson's opinion had no acquaintance with the ancient models. He was essentially the child of fancy. And, therefore, he had no idea about literary principles. From this, the conclusion is incontestable that a man without literary principles is apt to become erratic. Moreover Shakespearian dramas were full of factual inaccuracies. Without any balance or proportion the plays were like gigantic torsoes. No doubt, Shakespeare had both felicity and facility of expression. But he was not a careful artist. He did not think it worth while to revise what he had once written. Mere warbling like a skylark with the first fine careless rapture or unpremeditated art may be commendable for a bird, but hardly commendable for an artist. Spontaneity is good; but along with spontaneity the artist must take infinite pains to bring about rounded perfection and felicity of loveliness. Shakespeare's Polonius advised his son to be neither a borrower nor a lender. Shakespeare according to Jonson, in defiance of his own copy-book maxims borrowed lavishly. His plots are drawn upon various sources. True, he has breathed new life into the borrowed skeletons. But he cannot have any claims to original thinking. It might be due not to Shakespeare's lack of creative imagination but a sort of mental lethargy. This allegation seems to be the reiteration of Greene's oftquoted saying that Shakespeare "is an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers." Jonson "Loved the man and worships his memory", but he could not consistently love Shakespeare's plays as works of art. He could separate the



man from the artist. Warm in his friendship for the man, he was a discerning critic.

T. S. Eliot says : "Ben Jonson's criticism of Shakespeare is of historical importance". It is historical, because it is the first critical assessment of Shakespeare's works. It is important because Jonson, the classicist is sitting in judgment over a romantic playwright. Nowhere is Jonson speaking *ex-cathedra*. It is often said that a critic is a poet manque, which cannot, of course, be said of Jonson. A poet and playwright of considerable distinction, Ben Jonson was a very important literary figure of his age. He is perhaps more important than most of his contemporaries, because he was extremely widely read. He had, therefore, the competence to judge a work of art from a correct perspective. He knew the yardstick with which to measure. The romantic writers of the age had no literary discipline. Caught in the vortex of unrestrained imagination, they were weaving a fine texture, which was palpably divorced from reality. Bohemian in life, they were Bohemian in their pattern of thought. Jonson in sharp contrast passed through a rigid literary discipline which was at once fruitful and rewarding. He could, therefore, be critical and maintain his objectivity. He could be sympathetic, yet he could be severe. Shakespeare with all his romantic extravagances appeared to be a wonder to Jonson. "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child" was warbling his native and wild wood-notes. Naive and unsophisticated, Shakespeare threw off the shackles of rules. He depended exclusively on inspiration. And whatever Longinus might say in favour of inspiration, Jonson could hardly stand it. He with his "learned socks" on believed not in the alembic of fancy, but in the brain-work. But Shakespeare was a wonder of wonders, a literary phenomenon who could not be judged by the accepted critical standards. Shakespeare's faults could be detected. Yet he could not but command respect and compel admiration. Almost everybody in that age praised Shakespeare. It was then almost a fashion to praise him, and nobody seriously thought of throwing him off the pedestal. Jonson did not praise Shakespeare so mechanically. He praised only because he could not help it. Intellectually honest, Jonson had a critical conscience. So when he was praising a writer, who was perfunctory and beautiful at the same time, he felt a little conscience-stricken. In the memorial verses Jonson was making a public utterance. That accounts

for the softness of tone. But in the private journals and conversations he was naturally a bit severe. He had there thrown off his reserve. Whatever might be the variation in tone Jonson was remarkably consistent in his views. He was like a Headmaster, to whom the welfare of the students is the supreme concern. Shakespeare is a brilliant student for whose composition Jonson is full of warm praise. The composition is brilliant but bristling with grammatical mistakes.

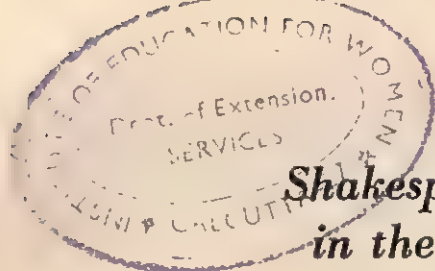
### *Milton and Shakespeare*

Milton was a true classicist and a puritan. It is not unreasonable to expect that he would have no sympathy for the romantic dramatists. Drama and theatrical entertainments were anathema to the puritans. And hence when Milton in his prose tract "*Iconoclastes*" stated that King Charles I in his period of incarceration found in Shakespeare's works "the closest companion of his solitude", there were critics who with an ironical grin said that Milton was criticising Charles, the symbol of tyranny, and also Shakespeare as he had sustained a bad king. Dr. R. K. Das Gupta in his well-written article "*Milton and Shakespeare*" gives the lie to this facile optimism and says "that Shakespeare could be a comforting poet to a deposed monarch might have been consistent with the dramatist".

This view is confirmed by the fact that Milton wrote, "An Epitaph on the admirable dramatic poet, W. Shakespeare",—a poem prefixed to the Second Folio of Shakespeare's works (1632). Milton was convinced that no memorial was Great enough for Shakespeare. Piled stones cannot commemorate him. His immortal works, which are "our wonder and astonishment", are a "live-long monument". In 1645, the title of the poem was changed to "On Shakespeare". The words "admirable dramatic poet" were deleted. The conclusion is irresistible that Milton's reverential attitude underwent some transformation. If this be so, it is again difficult to interpret some lines in *L'Allegro*. Ben Jonson was wearing his "learned sock", and "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child" was warbling his "native woodnotes wild". Again in *Il Penseroso*, Milton referred to the "buskined stage", i.e., the tragedies of the Elizabethan age. The tragedies, he maintained, were noble. But no one will assert that the *tragedies* refer to the tragedies of Shakespeare alone, and not the tragedies of Marlowe

and Kyd, who had lent so much of colour and charm to the Elizabethan drama. In his short essay on Tragedy, prefixed to *Samson Agonistes*, no where does Milton refer to Shakespeare. His determination to write a Hellenic drama itself is a challenge to Shakespeare. Swinburne wrote a drama on Attic lines. And yet his attitude to Shakespeare was reverential. Arnold wrote a drama on Attic lines, and in spite of his famous sonnet on Shakespeare, he was critical of the master. Milton's attitude also defies analysis.





## *Shakespearian Criticism in the Restoration Age*

Dryden is by far the greatest critic of Shakespeare in the Restoration Age. Dryden was a classicist and so was Ben Jonson, yet there is a difference, and the difference has to be accounted for. Jonson was the disciple of the ancient masters like Aristotle, Horace, Quintilian and Cicero. Dryden was born at a time when the critical authority had shifted to France. Thanks to Charles II and the Cavaliers, French ideas were thick in the air of the 17th Century England. The Neo-classicism in France had its exponents in Le Bossu, Rapin and Boileau. As the Restoration age was very much sophisticated, the stage conditions had almost undergone a sea-change. The simple stage of the Elizabethans without footlight and scenery was relegated to limbo. The stage became complicated, and stage-illusions were possible. The puritans had closed all the theatres in 1642. Immediately on his accession to the throne Charles II officially opened the theatres. The Elizabethan theatre was a national institution. The Restoration theatre was a coterie, meant only for a select few—the king, the nobles and the ladies. The open-air atmosphere was replaced by a close-room, rich in colours and perfumes, and therefore a little stuffy and stifling. The chief foreign influence on English drama came from France. Heroic play and the comedy of intrigue and manners became the accepted literary ideals. Rimed couplets, sickening rhetoric, elaborate scenery, violent action, sentiment, dances and songs captured popular imagination. The anti-puritan reaction was very strong. The drama was a presentation of the surface picture of contemporary life. Wit became extremely popular. Rapier-like dialogues, emanating from the head caught on.

French tastes were in evidence in every walk of life. The modes of life, tastes and ideas of the people across the channel were objects of emulation. The boy-actors of the Elizabethan age were replaced by actresses. All these changes in tastes, big and small, affected the critics of the age. A new climate of opinion

was thus created. And, therefore, as Ben Jonson the classicist had many hurdles to jump over before appreciating Shakespeare, so also the neo-classicists of the Restoration Age had similar difficulties in appreciating Shakespeare. Modelling their style on the French masters, the Restoration critics carped at the lack of polish in Shakespeare's style. The unbridled imagination of Shakespeare came in for criticism. The Restoration age like the age of Pope and Dr. Johnson was also the age of prose and reason. Shakespeare was, therefore, charged with his lack of balance and proportion. Marlowe and Shakespeare showed admirably the strength of the mighty lines of blank verse. For the French, blank verse was their pet aversion. Rhyme, which Milton was later to deride as "jinglings of like endings", became extremely popular with the neo-classical critics of England.

Despite these passions and prejudices, Dryden could appreciate Shakespeare, and his criticism is at once sympathetic and discerning. A poet and dramatist of considerable distinction, Dryden had a wonderful critical acumen. He was a scholar, but he wore his scholarship like a flower in the button hole, and never carried it like a portmanteau. In spite of his neo-classical bias he could unquestionably trace his descent not from Aristotle but Longinus, the first romantic critic in the classical age. Dryden's poetry had a romantic tinge, for he had fine poetic and imaginative sensibilities. The romantic attitude was tempered by a strong common-sense. He was the type of the wise, who soar but never roam. Dryden never spoke dogmatically or pontifically. He was neither a dictator, nor a legislator. He had a rich fund of sweet reasonableness. His mind had an unequalled range and freedom. He had the courage of conviction to say that "What the Greeks would not satisfy an English audience". The Athenians, Dryden contended, had a different conception of ethics, religion and drama. Tragedy to them was a ritual, a symbol of their worship. "If we are to understand Sophocles", says C. M. Bowra, "as he ought to be understood, we must try to see him with the eyes and mind of the fifth century. It is an unattainable ideal". To Dryden also, it was an unattainable ideal. Much water has flowed down the Thames bridge since Aristotle's time. Ideals, tastes and values have been radically changed. Then again, Aristotle had not before him all the types or genres of drama to draw conclusions from. It will not be wide of the mark if we say that Aristotle himself would have formulated different

critical theories, were he but acquainted with the romantic dramas of the age of Queen Elizabeth. Yet Dryden was not a stickler for unrestrained imagination. "Imagination in a poet", he said, "is a faculty so wild and lawless, that, like a high-ranging spaniel, it must have clogs". "The secret of Dryden's greatness as a critic," says Atkins, "lay after all in himself, in that native sensibility which made him keenly alive to artistic values capable also of a dispassionate psychological analysis of those values. What he found to admire in Shakespeare or Chaucer was based on no formal rules, but on his own instinctive reactions submitted to the best of Nature or reason, a test, it should be added, which to him represented something more than mere common sense or the prose understanding. The truth was that his judgment, at its best, both in theorising and appreciating, was of a suprarational kind. It sprang from an imaginative sympathy which soared beyond any thing that the pure unaided intellect could discern. Firmly based on his own impressions, his appreciations were something more than the result of acute analysis and sound reasoning, though these two played their part in confirming the faith that was in him. They were rather the result of a synthetic process which viewed the effects observed with a critical insight akin to the creative vision, that detected in the multiplicity of those effects meaning and coherence, thus penetrating to the heart of things. In short, it is not too much to say that with Dryden in his psychological judgments the creative imagination was unconsciously at work a century or more before the process itself had been realized and defined."

This background will be a clue to a better understanding and appreciation of Dryden as a Shakespearian critic. The Restoration age was not very kind or generous to Shakespeare. Heroic drama and the comedies of manners were the rage of the day, and Shakespearian drama was caviare to the age. But Dryden had a true historic sense. He knew that literature was the product of the society. Romantic drama grew out of historic necessity. It was inevitable. Dryden accepted this historic fact. He threw off the neo-classical fetters and succeeded in transcending the limitations of his age. He did not think that the comedy of manners and Heroic tragedy were the last word in the history of literature.

Dryden wrote on Shakespeare on different occasions. In 1668 appeared his famous Essay on Dramatic poesy, where



Dryden paid his glowing tributes to Shakespeare, about whom he wrote :

"He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them, not laboriously, but luckily ; when he describes any thing, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation : he was naturally learned ; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature ; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike ; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid ; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great, when some great occasion is presented to him ; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

*Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.*

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eaton say, that there was no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakespeare ; and however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him Fletcher and Johnson, King's Court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set out Shakespeare far above him.

\* \* \*

If I would compare him [ Ben Jonson ] with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets ; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing ; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare."

Dryden the classicist admired Ben Jonson, the classicist, but loved Shakespeare, the romantic. Among the four interlocutors Sir Robert Howard, Lord Buckhurst, Sir Charles Sedley and the author, Dryden took up the defence of the English stage and showed convincingly that it was decidedly superior to the French stage. And to defend the English stage is not merely to defend the Restoration dramatists but also Shakespeare. Dryden retained his dispassionateness as a critic all through. He

praised Shakespeare where praise was due, and he criticised Shakespeare when, he believed, Shakespeare should come in for criticism. He is unsparing in his criticism of Shakespeare's passion for punning and love of bombast. But among his virtues were his unlaboured art, his wonderful characterisation and extraordinary genius. Dryden judged Beaumont, Fletcher and Ben Jonson intellectually. He had warm praise for them. But he "loved" Shakespeare. Here Shakespeare's appeal was emotional, and Dryden suspended the rules, inherited from the ancients and the French.

In his *Essay on the Dramatic poetry of the last Age* (1672) Shakespeare is again vindicated. He conceded that any reader would find in every page of Shakespeare "either some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense." Yet Shakespeare compelled reverence. Shakespeare's "wit is great," and expressions noble. The age of Shakespeare was not mature or congenial for poetry. Yet Shakespeare could transcend the limitations of his age. "Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity." Dryden charged the Elizabethan dramatists in general with lameness of plots. Their stories were ridiculous and incoherent. Shakespeare also could not absolve himself. His *Pericles*, the *Winter Tale*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Measure for Measure* were carped at. Dryden concluded :

"Shakespeare who many times has written better than any poet, in any language, is yet so far from writing wit always, or expressing that wit according to the dignity of the subject, that he writes, in many places, below the dullest writer of ours or any precedent age. Never did any author precipitate himself from such height of thought to so low expressions, as he often does. He is the very Janus of poets ; he wears almost everywhere two faces ; and you have scarce begun to admire the one, ere you despise the other."

Dryden said that Shakespeare was wearing two faces. Dryden himself wears two faces in his attitude to Shakespeare. Apparently he blows hot and cold in the same breath. But it is not so. A conscious artist that Dryden was, he wished Shakespeare to be a little more conscious. With all his greatness Shakespeare, Dryden contended, was extremely erratic. Shakespeare, deserved praise with qualification. He was great, not without lapses.

In the Prologue to *Julius Caesar* (1672) Dryden praised Shakes-

peare for his spontaneity of expression and artless beauty. "Such artless beauty lies in Shakespeare's wit." "His excellencies came and were not sought." Jonson criticised Shakespeare for his unlaboured expression. Dryden praised Shakespeare precisely for that reason. Shakespeare might not have had bookish learning.

"Those then that tax his learning are to blame,

He knew the thing, but did not know the name."

For Shakespeare drew liberally upon life and nature. Jonson was faultless; he was meticulously correct. But, "Shakespeare made faults; but then did more excel" Jonson. Jonson was an imitator, while "Shakespeare made his own." Jonson was like an anatomist. He dissected human kind. But Shakespeare "like a master did design."

The preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) has been called by Augustus Ralli as "one of his trumpet blasts of eulogy." Shakespeare is a master in characterisation. But he "often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible." Both the charges are sufficiently damaging, and need some explanation. Shakespeare often wrote in a hurry. His texts have not often been transmitted properly. Dishonest stenographers often surreptitiously smuggled out some of the plays. That is why Shakespearian texts present insuperable difficulties. Jonson edited his own works, and whatever he might be charged with, he will never be charged with obscurity.

According to Dryden, Shakespeare's style often degenerated to something ludicrous. But nevertheless he knew how to distinguish the "blown puffy style" from sublimity. It was followed by Dryden's classic utterance: "The fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment." To illustrate his criticism of Shakespeare for his lapses in style, diction and versification. But it will appear even to a superficial observer that in the passage quoted from *Hamlet*, Shakespeare was actually parodying the stock-in-trade was rant and bombast.] To Dryden some passages in Shakespearian plays were full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. They were words, words and words which yielded very little sense. Common people like to feast upon sonorous words, and Shakespeare provided a rich fare for them. "But Shakespeare," Dryden conceded, "does not often thus; for the passion in his



scene between Brutus and Cassius is extremely natural, the thoughts are such as arise from the matter, the expression of them not viciously figurative." Another passage was quoted from *Richard II*, which could be written only by a "divine poet." Even if Shakespeare's works are couched in vulgar words, we should nevertheless find the beauties of his thoughts. The imitators of Shakespeare imitated only the vices, but could not emulate the virtues. Perhaps his virtues are too great to be imitated. Men of ordinary calibre try to imitate Shakespeare and fail miserably. For their futility Shakespeare is blamed. "Therefore, let not Shakespeare suffer for our sakes ; 'tis our fault, who succeeds him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill, that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in him was an imperfection." Shakespeare was a poet of manly passions. Fletcher with all his artistic excellences was distinctly inferior to Shakespeare. Fletcher was "a limb of Shakespeare." For Shakespeare had a universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions.

In the prologue to the *Tempest* Shakespeare has been called the monarch of wit, art and nature. All writers owe to Shakespeare in some form or other.

"If they have since out-writ all other men,

'tis with the drops which fell from Shakespeare's pen."

Attempts have often been made to imitate Shakespeare. "But Shakespeare's magic could not copied be." For "Shakespeare's power is sacred as a king's." From the summary of the prologue, short as it is, it will appear that Dryden's criticism is almost bordering on worship.

In the preface to *All For Love*, Dryden again paid his homage to the master. *All For Love* is an imitation, and not a very successful one, of *Antony and Cleopatra*. He had a good deal of trepidation to "imitate the Divine Shakespeare." An ardent champion of rhyme, Dryden in this play tried to imitate Shakespeare's blank verse also. Often has Dryden found fault with Shakespeare's style. But here he said ecstatically. "It is almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure." Taught in the school of life, Shakespeare, it is a wonder, "should by the force of his own genius perform so much, that in manner he has left no praise for any who come after him."

In the prologue to *Aureng-zebe*, Dryden puts his hat off to Shakespeare. "Shakespeare's sacred name" is awe-inspiring. The

Elizabethan age was less polished and more unskilled than the Restoration Age. Yet the galaxy of writers of the polished age pays homage to Shakespeare. In the prologue to *Troilus and Cressida* spoken by Betterton, representing the ghost of Shakespeare, the Elizabethan master looms large before our vision, flaunting the evergreen laurels, the dream of poets and dramatists, yet always eluding their grasp. Shakespeare was made to say :

Untaught, unpractis'd, in a barbarous Age,  
I found not, but created first the stage,  
And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,  
'Twas, that my own abundance gave me more.

Jonson and Dryden were at times critical of Shakespeare. Both had also reverence for the master. The extraordinary genius of Shakespeare baffled them, and they could not reduce it to a system. Rules failed to measure him. Jonson's criticism is fragmentary, and often tended to generalise. Dryden, on the other hand, was more detailed, and he tried to illustrate his points.

Dryden, and not Maurica Morgann, should be called the romantic critic of Shakespeare. Jonson carped at Shakespeare for his inability to observe the rules or for his flagrant violation of the rules laid down by the ancients. Dryden's criticism has a more abiding interest. Not in vain has he been called the father of English criticism. T. S. Eliot rightly observes : "Whenever Dryden mentions Shakespeare, Dryden's opinion must be treated with respect." True, Dryden could not always transcend the limitations of his age. But often he could. "Again and again," says Ralli, "after one of his flights of praise, he droops his wings and settles upon earth, and blames Shakespeare according to current orthodox notions of what verse should be, or tragedy or comedy, or plot or character-drawing." This is not fair criticism. For Dryden was the first critic who did not like to judge Shakespeare by the classical standards. Classical rules tended to encourage procrustean moulds. Rules are for plodding mediocrities. A genius will smart under rules. And hence Aristotle is hardly a safe guide for the appreciation of Shakespeare. Aristotle had an acquaintance with a particular pattern of drama. The tragic dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were all that Aristotle could come across. He could not visualise the glorious heritage of poetry.

And though thy soul sail leagues and leagues beyond,—  
Still, leagues beyond those leagues, there is more sea.

Aristotle could not with all his prophetic vision foresee the efflorescence of the romantic drama which would be a bold and distinct step ahead of classical drama. Dryden believed in poetic license and the sanction of genius. He had little sympathy with the pedantic scholars and critics who had no creative urge in themselves, but condemned those who had it. The dryasdust rules were not enough to measure Shakespeare with. Not idolatrous, Dryden should yet be credited with having given a new direction in Shakespearian criticism. He did criticise Shakespeare, but he traced at the same time the elements of enduring value.

In the Restoration period, the plays of Shakespeare were not found acceptable. France had polished the taste of the English people. So D'avenant started refining Shakespeare. D'avenant's mantle fell upon Dryden. He had in *All For Love* a refined version of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. What was of cosmic interest in Shakespeare's play became a thing of ephemeral interest. Dryden began his story only after the battle of Actium. Shakespeare disregarded the unities, Dryden observed them, and he thought that it was a distinct improvement upon Shakespeare. To justify his refinement of *Troilus and Cressida*, Dryden said: "It must be allowed to the present age, that the tongue in general is so much refined since Shakespeare's time, that many of his words, and more of his phrases, are scarce (sic) intelligible. And of those which we understand, some are ungrammatical, others coarse; and his whole style is so pestered with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure." On different counts the play was "a heap of rubbish." So Dryden refined the play. The plot itself underwent drastic changes. Quite a number characters which Dryden thought, were not properly delineated, were re-assessed. The language of the original play was "obsolete." And hence language also came under the knife. The title of the play was changed to *Truth Found Too Late*. Cressida, the wanton girl became an embodiment of chastity.

Dryden refined some of the plays of Shakespeare in deference to the spirit of the age. But he should be credited with having popularised Shakespeare, thrown in cold neglect. Precepts and



rules, he boldly asserted, were not sacrosanct. He sincerely believed that Shakespearian plays were pure gold ; and it was for him to eliminate the dross.

### Other Restoration Critics

Edward Philips, the son of Milton's sister is remembered for his *Theatrum Poetarum* (1675). Philips agreed that Shakespeare had "unfiled expressions rambling and indigested fancies," and was yet "a poet above many that go beyond him in literature." Shakespeare was the "glory of the English stage." While assessing Shakespeare the question of decorum must be set aside. He was essentially a "maker". None could reach his tragic height. "Never any represented nature more purely to the life, and where the polishments of Art are most wanting,... he pleaseth with a certain wild and native elegance."

Samuel Pepys can on no account be called a critic. Yet he left a *diary* (1660-69), which is a record of theatrical appreciation from the common man's point of view. The diary extends from January 1, 1660 to May 31, 1669 and records the fire, the plague, the Dutch war, theatres, operas and various other London amusements. Born in an age when French new-classicism was the rage, Pepys was essentially an impressionist, and his views on Shakespeare might be regarded as those of an average Englishman. He was enchanted by *Hamlet* but *Twelfth Night* was disappointing. "It was a silly play." *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* was "the most insipid, ridiculous play." *Othello* was "mighty good". But *Macbeth* appealed to him most.

Thomas Rymer, a fanatic advocate of the rules of the Ancients is remembered for his *Short view of Tragedy*. A scholar of distinction, Rymer had no artistic sense or poetic appreciation. What he stressed in his *The Tragedies of the Last Age considered and Examined by the practice of the Ancients, and by the common sense of all Ages*, had been developed in his *Short view of Tragedy*. Macaulay called him "the worst critic who ever lived." But in his time Rymer, as Atkins points out, shared the authority with Dryden. Today he has earned notoriety for his foolish and perverse strictures on Shakespeare. He tried to popularise the neo-classical doctrines of Rapin. He believed that the English poets and dramatists had considerably lost through their neglect of the rules of the Ancients. He tried in his own way to account for the decline of English tragedy. His *Short view* is at once a

record of his extraordinary scholarship and passions and prejudices. In his opinion, Shakespeare would not have bungled had he adhered to the classical models. *Gorboduc* would be his safest guide. "In Tragedy he appears quite out of his element ; his brains are turned, he raves and rumbles, without any coherence ; any spark of reason, or any rule to control him, or set bounds to his frenzy." *Othello* of all plays comes in for the severest criticism. But the play is "plainly more than a bloody farce, without salt or savour." Plot is the soul of tragedy, and the plot of *Othello* is absurd and fantastic. The characters of *Othello* and *Iago* are equally unconvincing. There is no nobility of thought and expression. Shakespeare catered for the tastes of the uneducated, uncultured Elizabethan groundlings. And hence so much of crudity in the entire conception of the drama. *Julius Caesar* is full of ridiculous contradictions. Shakespeare could turn out a comedy, but Ralli rightly said that the mad criticism of tragedy was never his strong point. Rymer was "atheistic". He was a dissector but not a critic. He had neither sympathy nor imagination—the two essential virtues of a good critic.

Charles Gildon exalted classical drama, and yet he is a better critic than Rymer. He deserves mention for his *Reflections on Mr. Rymer's short view of Tragedy and an attempt at a vindication of Shakespeare*. He is also credited with the *Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England*. With no sympathy for Rymer, whom he characterised as a "hypercritic," Gildon said that if Juno could be the heroine of a great epic, Desdemona could very well be the heroine of a tragedy. Shakespeare, it is true, did not know the classical rules. Yet in his tragedies he could move pity and fear, so much extolled by Aristotle. If pleasure and profit be the objects of a drama, Shakespeare has indisputably achieved his objects. A neo-classicist as Gildon was, he must have suspended his critical conscience while assessing Shakespeare. But in his *Complete Art of Poetry*, he became, as D. Nichol Smith says, "a slave to the French Doctrine of the rules." He detected only the "monstrous absurdities" of Shakespeare.



## *The Eighteenth Century Shakespearian Criticism*

The eighteenth century Shakespearian criticism did not completely break with the tradition of the seventeenth century. The principles of criticism enunciated by Ben Jonson and Dryden were still a dynamic force. One thing noticeable, however, was that neo-classicism was challenged in certain quarters. The influence of the court on literature was distinctly on the wane. People were emerging out of the ruts of immorality, so much encouraged by King Charles II, and his court. Theatre and drama were so long the favourite haunts of the upper stratum of the society. In the eighteenth century middle class people came to power. They became the law-givers of the new age. A rational outlook was fostered by Hobbes, Locke and Newton. Exactly like the Twentieth century, the Eighteenth century became the age of interrogation. Accepted values were in the melting pot. Arnold rightly called the Eighteenth century, the age of prose and reason. The French theorists like Boileau, Le Bossu and Rapin were weighed in the balance and found wanting.

The Eighteenth Century critics had neither any conceit nor any self-complacency. Completely free from pedantry, and urged by an honest and sincere endeavour to record their convictions, the critics never wrote what they did not experience. They can, therefore, be rightly credited with having laid the true foundation of Shakespearian criticism. They were never carried away in their excessive zeal like the romantic critics. Nor were they over-rationalistic like Stoll and Schucking. David Nichol Smith has rightly observed that the eighteenth century knew many things which the Nineteenth century later rediscovered.

The eighteenth century critics had, however, a few disabilities. They were not normally susceptible to the beauty of poetry. They did not set much store by the aesthetic aspect of drama. That is why textual criticism figured so prominently in that age. Moral consideration weighed with them very much and replaced every



thing else. They did not follow Aristotle *in toto*. They were, however, out and out Aristotelian in their emphasis on plot.

Nicholas Rowe is credited with having written the first biography of Shakespeare. He regarded Shakespeare as his model. For in the prologue to a play called *Jane Shore*, he wrote :

In such an age, immortal Shakespeare wrote,  
By no quaint rules, nor hampering critics taught ;  
With rough majestic force, he mov'd the heart,  
And strength and nature made amends for art.

Before Rowe a few other writers tried their hands in writing the life of Shakespeare. They include Fuller, Phillips, Winstanley, Langbaine, Pope Blount and Jeremy Collier. But Rowe's *Account of Shakespeare* remained the standard biography for nearly a century. With him began an honest attempt to study the texts of Shakespeare. Critics of the Eighteenth century no longer pronounced verdicts on Shakespeare. They studied the Folios and Quartos and endeavoured to present improved texts. Nicholas Rowe set the ball rolling. Pope, Theobald Hanmer, Warburton, Johnson, Capell and Steevens inaugurated a new age in Shakespearean scholarship.

Rowe edited the six-volume plays of Shakespeare. In his view Shakespeare was essentially the product of nature. It is good that he has little familiarity with the ancients. For in that case he would have lost his refreshing originality and romantic extravagances. Shakespeare without bookish knowledge outshone Ben Jonson with all his pretensions to learning. Rowe grouped Shakespeare's plays into two broad divisions—tragedies and comedies. What are known popularly as historical plays are also in essence either tragedies or comedies. The comic characters of Shakespeare are a source of great entertainment. "Falstaff is allowed by everybody to be a masterpiece." With all his faults Falstaff is agreeable. The rejection of Falstaff causes pain to many a reader. The images in different plays are life-like. "But certainly the greatness of this author's genius does nowhere so much appear, as where he gives his imagination an entire loose, and raises his fancy to a flight above mankind and the limits of the visible world." Not a scholar in the accepted sense of the term, Shakespeare has delineated characters that are aglow with life, fire and passion. Born in the neo-classical age, Rowe could yet transcend the vagaries, passions and prejudices of his time.

He willingly accepted Jonson's statement about Shakespeare's "small Latin and less Greek." That was, however, Shakespeare's asset and not liability. Scholastic learning could make a man "correct," and would at best make him a carbon copy of Ben Jonson. Shakespeare flouted the rules of the Ancients, and became a world-figure. The Elizabethan age was an age of licence. Neither critics nor authors encouraged or allowed any kind of regimentation. Shakespeare is a product of that age.

Rowe made an honest attempt to restore Shakespeare. He did not reform; he did not refine; he only restored. Not a great dramatist, Rowe had nevertheless distinguished himself as a Shakespearian editor. Heminge and Condell were sincere, but they had no editorial tradition to draw upon. Moreover, their edited texts were bristling with mistakes. Rowe for the first time threw light, however fitful, upon this problem. He made the plays of Shakespeare intelligible by dividing them into acts and scenes. His biography of Shakespeare is a farrago of facts and fiction. Betterton and D'avenant told him many anecdotes about Shakespeare which were integrated into a full-length picture, coloured by imagination. His biography of Shakespeare with all its faults remained for many years the standard work. But his edition of Shakespeare was very soon found inadequate, although he could not be dislodged from his eminence as the first remarkable Shakespearian editor.

Joseph Addison, a great critic of the eighteenth century, said little about Shakespeare. It was a wonder that in his *Account of the Greatest English Poets*, he did not mention Shakespeare even for once. In the *Spectator*, however, he wrote something about Shakespeare that deserves mention. Addison was quite critical in his attitude to the neo-classical school. The rules of the Ancients have had their day. "Good taste" was the only test of literary appreciation. "Our critics," he complained, "do not seem sensible that there is more beauty in the works of a great genius who is ignorant of the rules of art, than in those of a little genius who knows and observes them." Shakespeare was a wild, irregular genius. Yet as a poet he was not only admirable but also adorable. A natural genius that Shakespeare was, he could compare favourably with Homer. "Shakespeare was indeed born with all the seeds of poetry, and may be compared to the stone in Pyrrhus's ring, which, as Pliny tells us, had the figure of Apollo and the nine Muses in the veins of it, produced by

the spontaneous hand of nature, without any help of art." Addison laid emphasis on Shakespeare's spontaneity and creative imagination, and, thus, became a precursor of romantic criticism.

John Dennis is an inheritor of unfulfilled renown. All his works are an eloquent testimony to his scholarship. Yet he was derided after the publication of his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare*. Addison and Pope were antagonised, and he became an object of ridicule. He came to be known as "Zoilus," a Greek rhetorician who had earned a good deal of notoriety. Dennis believed that poetry must have an emotional appeal. "The poet" he said, "is obliged to speak always to the heart." In an age of prose and reason he was, therefore, an anachronism. A distinguished classical scholar, Dennis could overcome the dogmatism of the classical scholars. In his *Impartial critic*, he went so far as to suggest that the English dramatists should not emulate the ancient tragedies. He was liberal in his outlook, and could appreciate the untutored, wild genius of Shakespeare. Tragedy was Shakespeare's strong point—his "master-passion." Shakespeare's thoughts are noble, his sentiments lofty, and his expression has an abiding charm. In characterisation he is a wizard. "Shakespeare", he said, "was one of the greatest geniuses that the world e'er saw." Dennis, however, charged Shakespeare with historic inaccuracy. In his criticism that poetic justice was ignored by Shakespeare, Dennis became Johnson's precursor. But these faults, to quote Atkins "were primarily due to the age in which he [Shakespeare] lived." Dennis pointed out Shakespeare's defects only to heighten his inexpressible virtues. Ralli has rightly observed :

"It would be juster to say that there are two Dennises—one who loves the classics, and one who loves Shakespeare—and that he cannot fuse his two passions...The ultimate impression from his work is that he could appreciate the greatest things in Shakespeare, could lose himself in Shakespeare, and only number his faults when he awoke from his dream."

Alexander Pope's avowed object in life was "correctness" or perfection of style. Walsh made this remark to Pope that there was one way left of excelling, for though they had several great poets, they never had one great poet that was correct ; and he desired to make that his [Pope's] study and his aim." Pope became a "correct poet," and represented the Augustan Age—the age of prose and reason. Yet Pope could appreciate Shakespeare



and throw off the neo-classical fetters. He was the second editor of Shakespeare. He published the plays of Shakespeare in six Quarto volumes in 1725, and prefixed a critical preface. Normally irascible by temperament, Pope had not that joyous abandon in his criticism. His approach was negative rather than positive. In many cases his criticism was a mere cento of quotations. In literary appreciation he maintained that one should conform to nature. But nature is to be "methodised." At times Pope could overcome his craze for "correctness." In his preface to the translation of the *Iliad*, he praised Homer not for his "correctness," but for his abundant wealth of fancy and imagination. He knew that in great poetry there were "nameless graces which no methods teach." In his *Essay on criticism* his rigidity of views was considerably relaxed. Rules, he believed, were necessary, but they were not enough. The classicist had a distinct romantic bias.

"Pope," complained Saintsbury, had "obstinate superficiality—the reduction of everything, even the most recondite problems of philosophy, even the most far-ranging questions of erudition, to a jury of 'commonsense' persons, decorated with a little of the fashion of the time—which had set in, found in him an exponent as competent to give it exquisite expression as he was indisposed, and probably incompetent, to deepen or extend its scope." In his appreciation of Shakespeare, his superficiality was an asset. He judged Shakespeare with his sturdy common sense. "To judge Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules," Pope said, "is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another." Shakespeare had, no doubt, faults. But his virtues outweighed his vices. "Of all English poets Shakespeare must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, and to afford the most numerous, as well as most conspicuous instances, both of beauties and faults of all sorts." More enthusiastic than critical, Pope wanted to extenuate Shakespeare's faults.

Shakespeare, Pope recorded happily, is justly and universally elevated above all other dramatists. "If ever any author deserved the name of an original, it was Shakespeare." Shakespeare in a sense was even greater than Homer, and his poetry was genuinely inspired. "He is not so much an imitator, as an instrument, of nature." The characters in his dramas are not an imitation of Nature, but Nature herself. Shakespeare had a thorough command over his passions. In his dramas do we find the happy synthesis

of passion and reason. Shakespeare may not have the knowledge of languages. But there is no denying the fact that he had profound learning. Learning and knowledge of languages are not identical. Yet he had his faults as an artist. Shakespeare's dramas are like an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture, and not like a neat modern building. A modern building is elegant and colourful, while the Gothic structure is strong and solemn.

Pope, said Arnold, was the classic of our prose, and not the classic of our poetry. Yet Pope was a poet, and could, therefore, feel like Dryden the warmth of the passion and poetry of Shakespeare. The other neo-classicists who were not poets, thought Shakespeare to be on the same footing with the ancient masters. Pope said in unambiguous terms that Shakespeare had outshone them.

Pope should also be credited with having made the first historical approach to the texts of Shakespeare. He was one of the first editors of Shakespeare who assessed the relative importance of the Folios and the Quartos. In his view, the Quartos with all their crudities and imperfections were decidedly better than the Folio, the accredited definitive edition of Shakespeare.

Conceit is the bane of a critic. And Pope was conceited. Nor had he the patience to read the collations or variant readings of the Shakespearian plays. The result was disastrous. Pope became Shakespeare's mentor. His own passions and prejudices, his own arbitrary views were thrust on Shakespeare. The notes and explanations were often guess-work. The readings were, therefore, highly subjective. In textual criticism subjectivity is a liability. Theobald rightly said that Pope "inflicted a wound where he intended a cure." Pope, one fears, was not intellectually honest. He claimed that he had consulted twenty-nine Quartos. But it will appear even to a superficial observer that Pope had based his reading on Rowe's edition and the fourth Folio; but the notes and explanations are his own. One example will serve our purpose. Othello in his fits of jealousy was almost mad and began ejaculating incoherently. The romantic poet that Othello was, he yet spoke in prose. For he had then a distraught mind. All the mad scenes in Shakespeare are in prose. Verse presupposes an ordered and balanced mind. That explains Othello's incoherent prose. But Pope failed to understand this simple truth and relegated the passage to the margin.

The eighteenth century was the age of garden-bred elegance.

Consistent with the spirit of the age Pope filed and polished some of the verses of Shakespeare. This was a notable emendation, but if it was excusable, is a different question. "Pope's Shakespeare," says Halliday, "remains a deplorable failure." Accuracy was never his strong point. He wanted to leap into fame as a Shakespearian scholar, but he was not inclined to pay the price for it. And hence Pope's criticism is admired even to-day not so much for its scholarship and accuracy as for the fact that it was the appraisal of a poet by a poet.

Lewis Theobald is the third editor of Shakespeare and outshone his predecessors. A hackwriter, a minor poet and dramatist, Theobald came to limelight for his *Shakespeare Restored, or a specimen of the many Errors as well committed as unamended by Mr. Pope in his late edition, of this poet; designed not only to correct the said Edition, but to restore the true Reading of Shakespeare in all the Editions ever published* (1726). His seven-volume edition of Shakespeare testifies to his prodigious scholarship. "Nothing is altered," he wrote, "but what by the clearest reasoning can be proved a corruption of the true text; and the alteration, a real restoration of the genuine reading." Theobald's avowed objective was to restore Shakespeare. The vagaries and guessworks of his predecessors were to be critically examined and the authentic Shakespeare presented. Some alterations were certainly effected, but they were all for the best. Theobald believed and was justified in believing that Pope's edition had done distinct disservice to Shakespearian scholarship. He fell foul of Pope in the very title of his work. But in the body of the book there are laudatory references to Pope. "Wherever I have the luck to be right in any observation, I flatter myself Mr. Pope will be pleased that Shakespeare receives some benefit." But Pope was not pleased. He made Theobald the hero of the *Dunciad* and wrote:

In each she [Dulness] marks her image full express'd  
But chief, in Tibbald's monster-breeding breast;  
Studious he sate, with all his books around,  
Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound!  
Plunged for his sense, but found no bottom there,  
Yet wrote and floundered on, in mere despair,  
There hapless Shakespeare, yet of Tibbald sore,  
Wish'd he had blotted for himself before.

Pope's stricture undermined Theobald's reputation. Yet Theobald is pre-eminently a scholar. But as a critic his observations are



not important. In fact they are only a variation on the "wild, irregular genius" theme. Shakespeare's plays, Theobald maintained, are a source of our perennial pleasure. A child of nature, Shakespeare commands universal admiration. Other poets excelled in some spheres, while Shakespeare's genius was varied. Academically his education may not be sound, but genius ignores all formal education. His dramas testify to his knowledge of Greek and Latin. There are critics who carp at some of the inaccuracies of his history plays. But they forget that Shakespeare was not a historian, but an artist. In the white heat of his imagination he transformed the dryasdust historical facts into living realities, but the planes of reality of the artist and the historian are not always identical. Shakespeare is a master in the art of characterisation. Even the minor Characters of fops and clown are individualised and are pulsating with life.

Shakespeare's reputation in the Augustan age was slowly but steadily on the increase. Rowe defended Shakespeare: Dennis' advocacy was still warmer; Pope was equally effusive. But their tone is nevertheless a little apologetic. It appears as if they were condescending to admire an artist who was brilliant but erratic. Theobald's praise is, however, without reservation.

Theobald's contribution to Shakespearian scholarship deserves special mention. The Quartos and Folios were re-examined; and Theobald tried to present a rational explanation of the emendations. He was the first editor to point out that unscrupulous stenographers pirated Shakespeare's plays; and as those stenographers depended on their ears, often mistakes crept in. The Quartos are thus bristling with mistakes. But the first Folio was relatively free from mistakes. He, however, collated the First Folio and the Quartos, and without submitting to the guessworks and pontifical utterances of Pope, made such emendations as made sense. In fact he made more than three hundred alterations, and later critics and editors have not jettisoned them. Theobald had a distinct advantage over his predecessors and contemporaries. Widely read in Elizabethan literature, he was familiar with the nuances and subtle shades of meaning of many words that were in vogue in the Elizabethan age. He, therefore, understood many words which eluded the grasp of his contemporaries.

Pope ridiculed Theobald. But Theobald only wrote: "If Mr. Pope is angry with me for attempting to restore Shakespeare, I hope the public are not. Admit my sheets have no other merit,

they will at least have this : They will awaken him to some degree of accuracy in his next edition of that poet which we are to have in a few months ; and then we shall see whether he owed the errors of the former edition to indiligence or to inexperience in the author. And as my remarks upon the whole of Shakespeare shall closely attend upon the publication of his edition, I'll venture to promise without arrogance that I'll then give above five hundred more fair emendations that shall escape him and all his assistants."

This was, indeed, a predicament for Pope. For he could not contest the accuracy of Theobald's emendations. And hence in the second edition of Shakespeare's works, Pope accepted a good number of Theobalds' emendations. But he had neither the courtesy nor the honesty to acknowledge his debt. Theobald, so long mild in his counter-riposte, was not in a mood to let things lying down. He threatened to expose his plagiarism. And he did. The monumental edition of Shakespeare is a glory to Theobald and a lasting disgrace to Pope. In impotent rage Pope wrote about Theobald : "He since published an edition of Shakespeare, with alterations of the text, upon bare conjecture either of his own, or any others who sent them to him." The Verdict of posterity has gone in favour of Theobald.

Sir Thomas Hanmer is the fourth editor of Shakespeare. His edition of Shakespeare in six Quarto volumes is a landmark in the history of Shakespearian scholarship. Johnson who normally did not rhapsodise over any body, said about Hanmer that he had "the first requisite to emendatory criticism, that intuition by which, the poet's intention is immediately discovered." But intuition, whatever be its merit, is not always a safe guide for a critic. Often led by vagaries, which may euphemistically be called intuition, Hanmer contributed notes and readings like those of Pope which were largely guessworks. And that is why Johnson said again that he "invented or borrowed, into the page, without any notice of varying copies, he has appropriated the labours of his predecessors, and made his own edition of little authority."

Hanmer in his *preface* paid glowing tributes to Shakespeare's genius. Shakespeare like an ambidexter has written tragedies and comedies with equal ease and felicity. But there were vulgarities in some of his plays. Hanmer himself accounted for

that, and said that these were inevitable as Shakespeare had to cater for the Elizabethan groundlings. Hanmer rightly said :

"Since therefore other nations have taken care to dignify the works of their most celebrated poets with the fairest impressions beautified with the ornaments of sculpture, well may our *Shakespeare* be thought to deserve no less consideration ; and as a fresh acknowledgment hath lately been paid to his merit, and a high regard to his name and memory, by creating his statue at a public expense ; so it is desired that this new Edition of his works, which hath cost some attention and care, may be looked upon as another small monument designed and dedicated to his honour."

Hanmer claimed that his edition of Shakespeare was "true and correct". It could be so, only had he relied a little less on "intuition" which might be an asset in aesthetic criticism, but undeniably a bane for a textual critic.

William Warburton is the fifth editor of Shakespeare. He was for some time the anonymous collaborator with Theobald. In the Theobald-Pope controversy he valiantly defended Theobald. He wrote about Pope that his contributions to Shakespearian scholarship were negligible ; he could fare better in his "libelling and bawdy ballad-making." Warburton helped Theobald considerably. The best notes of Theobald's edition, Johnson observed, were those of Warburton.

Warburton changed his loyalties and veered round Pope, and the latter promoted his interest. Warburton wrote :

"Nothing will give the common reader a better idea of the value of Mr. Pope's edition than the two attempts which have been since made, by Mr. Theobald and Sir Thomas Hanmer, in opposition to it, who, although they concerned themselves only in the first of these three parts of criticism, the restoring the text...yet succeeded so very ill in it, that they left their author in ten times a worse condition than they found him."

Warburton's unscrupulousness was manifest in his relation to Hanmer also, whom he easily let down. But that is a digression. Warburton published his eight-volume edition of Shakespeare in 1747. Giving the lie to his vocation as a clergyman, he almost brutally slated both Theobald and Hanmer, whom he charged with "dulness of apprehension and extravagance of conjecture." Man wars not with the dead. But Warburton did. He, figura-



tively though, exhumed the bones of Theobald and Hammer and desecrated them. Warburton wrote :

"Mr. Theobald was naturally turned to industry and labour. What he read he could transcribe ; but, as what he thought, if ever he did think, he could but ill express, so he read on ; and by that means got a character of learning, without risking, to every observer, the imputation of wanting a better talent. By a punctilious collation of the old books, he corrected what was manifestly wrong in the later editions, by what was manifestly right in the earlier. And this is his real merit ; and the whole of it." And worse still, he plagiarised and drew substantially upon the works of his predecessors without acknowledgment. Warburton's own emendations betrayed his colossal ignorance.

His preface says nothing new. Shakespeare, he maintained, knows every nook and cranny of human nature. His plays are, therefore, the transcript of human nature. He has successfully presented a wide variety of characters. But Shakespeare's style came in for criticism for its turgidity and unnaturalness. Shakespeare's greatness as an artist is due not to his conformity to the ancient models but his deviation from them. The entire gamut of human feelings is Shakespeare's canvas. Lacking in imagination, Warburton, strangely enough, did not dwell at length on the imaginative sensibilities of Shakespeare.

Thomas Edwards, though not a major critic, will be remembered for his sound strictures on Warburton in his amusing work *Supplement to Warburton's edition*, the title being *The Canons of criticism*. Holding on brief for Theobald or Hammer, Edwards exposed the hollowness of Warburton's pretensions. One or two canons of criticism, jestingly attributed to Warburton, may be cited : (a) A critic has the right to alter any passage that he may not understand ; (b) He may abuse Shakespeare for his inability to understand him ; (c) He may interpret his author so as to make him mean directly contrary to what he says ; and (d) He may dispense with truth.

All these canons sound amusing ; but in fact they are the rapier-thrusts against Warburton who had recourse to excruciating intellectual dishonesty. Edwards' criticism of Shakespeare is warm and genial. His appreciation of *King Lear* particularly is not merely the hysterics of a hero-worshipper. Here for the first time is an attempt to explore the recesses of the human mind. Edwards was a psychologist, but he did not know it.

*Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism* is devoted to a thorough examination of Shakespeare's plays. Kames was an aesthete, and not a textual critic. While dealing with the principles of taste and criticism Kames always drew upon Shakespeare for illustrations. A more discerning critic than many of his predecessors, Kames always kept his eyes and ears open to appreciate the subtleties and nuances of the plays of Shakespeare. Shakespeare had a profound knowledge of human nature. His plays are a faithful transcript of human laughter and tears, passions and emotions, sense and sensibility. "Shakespeare," Kames said, "is superior to all other writers in delineating passion." He never disgusted his readers with "general declamation and unmeaning words." For his "sentiments are adjusted to the peculiar character and circumstances of the speaker."

Born in the eighteenth century, Kames could yet outgrow the mechanical criticism of his age. He did not care to know if the classical unities were observed; not did he care for the mixture of the tragic and the comic elements, so much condemned by Sir Philip Sidney and his followers. Shakespeare's greatness, Kames contended, consisted in his wonderful-delineation of human character and passion. In this respect Shakespeare completely outshone even the Greek and the Roman dramatists. The structural side of Shakespeare's dramas did not engage his attention. The characters in the plays are living realities to him. They throb, they pulsate, their heartbeats are distinctly heard. Their minds are inscrutable. Kames tried to plumb the depth of their minds, and became a pioneer of the psychological school of criticism.

To Kames, Shakespeare's characters are life-like. They are drawn from life. Shakespeare did not say that this man or woman was good or bad. Let the characters speak for themselves. That is what they did. They revealed themselves in their actions, passions, emotion and sentiments. Thus multi-dimensional vignettes, absolutely true to life, emerged.

Shakespeare's individualised characterisation and faithful delineation of passions gripped Kames' adoration. He was, however, a little critical about Shakespeare's occasional lapses in style. He did concede that Shakespeare's style was excellent, but occasionally genuine passion degenerated into a conceit, and in a conceit there is a touch of artificiality. Not exactly a slave of rhetoric, Shakespeare did use rhetorical devices, particularly metaphors, similes and puns almost indiscriminately. These flights of

fancy, however, could be traced in the earlier and, therefore, immature plays. His later plays were almost completely free from these rhetorical exuberances. A little word-intoxicated in his earlier plays, he sometimes had a passion for language for the sake of language. That accounts for a little unnaturalness in expression. But subsequently he "attained the purity and perfection of dialogue." These are, however, all blemishes on the surface, and his beauties far outweigh and outnumber his blemishes. That is why Shakespeare, in the opinion of Kames, is the greatest dramatic genius of the world, and he shares the glory only with Corneille.

George, Lord Lyttleton in his Shakespearian criticism may have anticipated Landor's Imaginary Conversations. For in his *Dialogues of the Dead*, Lyttleton paid his tribute to Shakespeare in his imaginary conversation between Pope and Boileau. Since the discussion is in the form of a conversation, it has become to some extent dramatic in character. If objectivity is the aim of a dramatist (and here Lyttleton, the critic is a dramatist as well) it is difficult to ascertain his views on Shakespeare. Boileau with all the passions and prejudices of a neo-classicist, complained that in Shakespearian plays there was a "strange mixture of tragedy, comedy, and farce," Pope with the mantle of Boileau upon him yet valiantly defended Shakespeare against all attacks. Pope went into raptures when he said: "No other author had ever so copious, so bold, so creative an imagination, with so perfect a knowledge of the passions, the humours, and sentiments of mankind. He painted all characters, from kings down to peasants, with equal truth and equal force. If human nature were destroyed, and no monument were left of it except his works, other beings might know what man was from those writings." Boileau was at first amused at the thought that a veneration for Shakespeare was a part of the national character in England, but conceded at the same time that he admired him as a prodigy of genius. Lyttleton refused to be a partisan. He admirably summed up both the sides of the eighteenth century estimate of Shakespeare.

Thomas Gray though born in the age of prose and reason was yet one of the precursors of romanticism. It is not unlikely that his friend Horace Walpole whose *Castle of Otranto* was a landmark in romantic literature, might have influenced Gray, or it might be as well that the romantic seeds were stirring within him independently.



Gray did not write much on Shakespeare. Yet the little that he wrote is highly significant, as it brings into focus something entirely new. He did not care for the observance of the classical unities; the mixture of tragedy and comedy did not cause his brow-beat; romantic extravagances did not irritate him. A poet that he was, he for the first time drew the attention of the readers to the rich ores and witchery of Shakespeare's poetry. His letter to Richard West is pertinent.

"In truth, Shakespeare's language is one of his principal beauties; and he has no less advantage over your Addison's and Rowe's in this, than in those other great excellencies you mention. Every word in him is a picture."

In the same letter Gray caused a flutter to the complacency of the eighteenth century readers by saying that English had considerably degenerated in the eighteenth century, and no one could reproduce the pictorial effect of Shakespeare's plays. Gray did not like Greek Melpomene in England. The use of chorus in English tragedies, therefore, came in for bitter criticism. If Shakespearian tragedies are so convincing and effective even without the use of chorus, there is no point in sticking to the ancient Greek practice that deserves to be relegated to limbo. Chorus is a snag to the expression of thought.

In his Pindaric ode, *The progress of poesy* also Gray paid his homage to Shakespeare. Shakespeare was born in England which was not a land quite favourable to poetic genius. It was "not the shores of the Mediterranean where the Muses had dwelt before." Yet Shakespeare with his sheer genius outshone everybody. The darling child of Nature, William Shakespeare depicted Nature, stirring the joys and sorrows of the human heart. Shakespeare required no academic distinction to make him the supreme poet of all ages. Equally skilled in writing tragedies and comedies, Shakespeare unlocked the "gates of joy" and also opened "the sacred source of sympathetic tears."

Joseph Warton is more romantic than Gray in his Shakespeare criticism. In his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, Warton categorically pointed out that in poetry, creative and glowing imagination was essential. "The sublime and the pathetic are the two chief nerves of all genuine poesy. What is there transcendently sublime or pathetic in Pope?" Warton had enthusiasm, glowing imagination and a passionate sense of the beauties of nature—all the requisites of a romantic critic. Yet it is a wonder

that Ralli did not mention Warton in his encyclopaedic *History of Shakespearian criticism*.

Warton contributed five articles on Shakespeare to a periodical known as *The Adventurer*. D. Nichol Smith is right when he says that these five papers "have the historical interest of being the first pieces of Shakespeare criticism to form a series in a periodical. In this respect they correspond to Addison's papers on Milton in *The Spectator*."

In a number of articles that appeared in *The Adventurer*, Warton criticised the doctrines of the neo-classicists as they had a single-track approach to literary tastes and principles. The neo-classicists, he maintained, could not appreciate pathos and sublimity. They could not appreciate the manifold beauty of Shakespeare's plays. Warton is a disciple of Longinus in his critical theories. A great genius, he said, required no rules. In his flights in the realm of imagination he might commit some mistakes, which should be condoned. A faultless and immaculate poet is distinctly inferior to a genius, for genius has a more varied experience about life and nature. Warton complained that in the eighteenth century Fancy was crippled. Writers aimed at polish, correctness and garden-bred elegance. But "our irregular Shakespeare" with all his lapses has given a poignant expression of life.

It should, however, be remembered that Warton had no blind admiration for Shakespeare's plays. Nor did he indulge in "wanton invective". He fully agreed that Shakespeare like all men of extraordinary genius had "transcendent beauties" and "gross imperfections". Shakespeare "exhibits more numerous examples of excellencies and faults, of every kind, than are, perhaps, to be discovered in any other author." True, Shakespeare did not observe the unities of Time and Place. But his "lively creative imagination," his "strokes of nature and passion," and last but not least his "preservation of the consistency of his character" amply compensate for his lapses. All the excellences are manifest in *the Tempest*. Here Shakespeare united the power of poetry with propriety of character.

Many tragedies, ancient and modern, Warton complained, represented an excess of the passion of love resulting in a little effeminacy. Even Corneille and Racine, otherwise great dramatists, introduced the passion of love only to gratify ladies and sybaritic gentlemen. Shakespeare in contrast to these popular caterers has

shown in *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar* and *King Lear* that great tragedies can be written without having any bearing on gallantry and love.

Thomas Warton, the younger brother of Joseph Warton was the Professor of poetry at Oxford, and subsequently in recognition of his critical acumen he became the poet-laureate of England. In his monumental work *The History of English Poetry* he referred to Shakespeare only cursorily, not out of any disrespect, but only because his *History* was incomplete. An eminent precursor of romantic criticism, Warton was never carried away by any excess of zeal or hero-worship. Shakespeare was in quest of universal nature. His dramas are indeed a wonderful picture gallery of the varied life of his age. But Shakespeare lacked the sense of proportion. From the sublime he often jumped down to the ridiculous. His tragedies were keyed to a high pitch, and suddenly indiscriminate use of puns marred the effect. What could be a sublime was turned into a satire.

Warton could not appreciate the women characters of Shakespeare. To him the heroines of the comedies were mere "merry wives". Warton did not understand that the heroines were essential to the revelation of life. They are not merely merry wives. They have sympathy, love, attractive personality and remarkable intelligence. They are the victors of life. Warton unfortunately was blind to these aspects of the characters of the romantic heroines. He was also blind to the fact that the tragic heroines like Ophelia and Desdemona were not actually degraded to the background. They are quite in character and they have a distinct place in the tragic pattern.

Peter Whalley in his *An Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare* defended Shakespeare against the uncharitable criticism of the neo-classicists who spared no pains to reproach Shakespeare with want of learning. Shakespeare's genius and imagination were an ample compensation for his "small Latin and less Greek." He did not know the classical languages which are but dead languages. He knew the living language of life and nature. In the masterly delineation of passions he outshone even the Greek tragedians. In many respects he compared favourably even with Homer. In characterisation he is peerless. In his hands the real becomes heightened, and the reality is invested with an ineffable beauty and light that never was on sea or land, the consecration and the poet's dream. Whalley gave convincing proof of



Shakespeare's superiority to Ben Jonson, who even in the eighteenth century was almost an idol.

In more than one sense Whalley is a romantic critic. He did not set store by structural design or the three unities. His Yardstick is creative imagination. And no one, ancient or modern, had as much creative imagination as Shakespeare. Whalley also pointed out that Shakespeare could add delicate colour and beauty to the real.

Richard Farmer in his *Essay on the learning of Shakespeare* did not agree with Ben Jonson that Shakespeare had "small Latin and less Greek". Nor did he agree with Gildon, Sewell and Upton who thought Shakespeare to be a classical scholar. It was true, Farmer contended, that Shakespeare had no first hand acquaintance with Homer and Plutarch; North's translation of Plutarch was only laid under contribution and Golding was his source of Latin, yet Shakespeare developed a style that could be the envy of the ancients and the moderns. Shakespeare did not require "the stilts of language to raise him above all other men." For he knew the language of life.

Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu, popularly known as "The Madame du Deffand of the English capital" leaped into fame for her *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*. "There is no real criticism in it," said Dr. Johnson. But Thomas Warton and Cowper waxed eloquent about it. Mrs. Montagu's criticism is a spirited defence of Shakespeare against the bitter attack of Voltaire. She has often been reproached with superficiality, but in the history of Shakespearian criticism she has undoubtedly a secure niche.

Voltaire during his sojourn in England thoroughly studied Shakespeare, and in his *Lettres Philosophiques* was critical of Shakespeare. "Shakespeare boasted of a strong fruitful genius: he was natural and sublime, but had not so much as a single spark of good taste, or knew one rule of the drama." In his letter to the French Academy, Voltaire again fell foul of Shakespeare, who "was a savage... [and] had some imagination." Mrs. Montagu was not a woman to let it lying down. She vindicated Shakespeare and threw Voltaire off his pedestal. She questioned the authority of Voltaire to sit in judgement on Shakespeare. Voltaire also came in for criticism for his neo-classical doctrines. This part of Mrs. Montagu's criticism is not worth much. But her appreciation of Shakespeare, though at times a repetition of

what some of her predecessors said, is worthy of consideration. "Approved by his own age and admired by the next," Mrs. Montagu said, "he is revered, almost adored by the present refined age." In characterisation, expression and style he was undoubtedly without a peer. His works compel so much admiration that the critic's slandering voice is at once silenced. The boulders of stonehenge can be admired without knowing by what laws of mechanics they were raised. Her remarks on Shakespeare's History plays and supernaturalism are appreciative and original. She is one of the first critics to realise Falstaff's gusto and passion for life. She could, therefore, very well place him in the scheme of things.

In characterisation Shakespeare, Mrs. Montagu maintained, outshone even Homer. French tragedies dealt with love-intrigues and the superficial passions. Extraneous decorum was what they aimed at. Shakespeare fathomed the depth of the human mind and admirably delineated the deeper passions. He was the recorder of eternal passion, eternal pain. His dramas are also a faithful transcript of his age. Even in his comedies there is a healthy moral tone.

Edward Taylor was a neo-classicist in his outlook. In his *Cursory Remarks on Tragedy* he criticised Shakespeare for his inability to observe the neo-classical rules. Shakespeare has been extravagantly praised by all critics for nearly two centuries. Taylor thought that Shakespeare enjoyed undeserved praise. He threw the three unities to the four winds. Moreover, his dramas seem to be all fiction. There is no stamp of truth or verisimilitude on them. His poetry has its excellences ; in his comedies he shows some skill ; but in the tragedies he is absolutely out of his elements. Shakespeare is also charged with the absence of poetic justice. The shallow and superficial eighteenth century critics could not understand why in a tragedy reward and punishment were not proportionate to one's virtue or crime. Taylor, however, had also certain nice things to say about Shakespeare. Shakespeare was, indeed, endowed with remarkable creative imagination. His characters are all instinct with life. His poetry is unsurpassable. Yet after all this is said Taylor is but bound by the neo-classical fetters. Shakespeare, the poet, had his appeal to him ; but Shakespeare's unrivalled dramatic art left him cold.

Charlotte Lennox's reputation as a Shakespearian critic is

based upon her *Shakespeare Illustrated: or the novels and Histories on which the plays are founded*. Her work is presumably the first attempt to trace the sources of Shakespeare's plays. Today we have the monumental work of professor Geoffrey Bullough : *Dramatic and Narrative sources of Shakespeare*. But Lennox will always go down in history as a pioneer. It is said that Goldsmith was once advised to hiss Lennox's play as it was put on the stage, because she had attacked Shakespeare in her book *Shakespeare Illustrated*. But on a scrutiny it will appear that Lennox never attacked Shakespeare. She characterised the works of Shakespeare as the map of life. The seamy side of life as well as its deeper passions find an eloquent expression in his dramas. The passion he has depicted and the truth he has laid bare have a universal import. That is why his works have the stamp of eternity, which age will not wither nor will custom stale their variety.

Lennox complained on the ground that Shakespeare in making use of his sources altered and added much, but the additions and alterations did not heighten the beauty of the Plots. In *King Lear* Shakespeare made the original story more improbable. He also grossly violated poetic justice. In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare could not add much beauty, only because he had no familiarity with the original source. In *Othello* Shakespeare's departure from the original is very little. *Hamlet* is a play without poetic justice. In *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare is not sufficiently artistic. *Cymbeline* is fantastic and absurd. *Twelfth Night* is equally fantastic. In *All's well that Ends well* Helena is much less human and convincing than Helena of Boccaccio.

## Dr. Johnson as a Shakespearian Critic

Johnson is the culmination and fulfilment of the main tendencies of the eighteenth century criticism of Shakespeare. The last of the neo-classical critics, Johnson was always guided by reason and sturdy common sense. And hence he was not bound by conventional rules and dogmas. He was, however, not a romantic precursor. Art to him was a fragment of life. He wrote about Shakespeare: "This, therefore, is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life." Johnson was essentially a moralist. Art, he believed, is not for the sake of art but morality. A profound sense of morality pervades all his writings. A man living a healthy moral life, Johnson maintained, should be rewarded. Johnson could never reconcile himself to the death of Cordelia, who was a pattern of goodness and virtue. "I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor." Here Johnson seems to be a warm advocate for poetic justice. But he was blind to the panorama of life—life with all its cruelty and contradictions. In real life there is no scope for poetic justice. Johnson slightly shifted his position and showed his sturdy common sense when he said in the *Lives of the Poets*: "since wickedness often prospers in real life, the poet is certainly at liberty to give it prosperity on the stage. For if poetry is an imitation of reality, how are its laws broken by exhibiting the world in its true form? The stage may sometimes gratify our wishes, but if it be truly the mirror of life, it ought to show us sometimes what we are to expect."

We said that Johnson had slightly shifted his position, but the didactic tone remained unaltered. And hence he complained: "He [Shakespeare] sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose."

When the neo-classical critics so much emphasised the importance of the imitation of the ancient writers, it was significant



that Johnson categorically said : "No man ever yet became great by imitation." Literature in Johnson's view is not a mere servile imitation of the ancient models, but a representation of life, for life and nature are always the same. Unlike most of the neo-classicists, Johnson did not believe in the hide-bound rules. A genius, he readily conceded, could easily defy rules, and the defiance was all for the best. Johnson did not think it necessary to adhere to the unities of time and place, which were almost sacrosanct in his age. Defending the writers who refused to observe the unity of place, Johnson wrote :

"The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players."

Johnson has here common sense for his guide. He was not an advocate for the strict adherence to the unity of time. The interval between Acts' should also be left to the spectators' imagination.

Johnson defended the unity of action. It may, however, sound paradoxical that he defended tragi-comedy also. And is not a tragi-comedy a bold denial of the value of the unity of action ? Johnson defended Shakespeare's dramas, which were, strictly speaking, neither tragedies nor comedies. "Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind ; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combinations ; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another.

So very catholic in his views in many respects, Johnson is rather rigid with regard to the decorum in style. He was here pinned down by the neo-classical rules. "The pebble," he said, "must be polished with care, which hopes to be valued as a diamond ; and words ought surely to be laboured when they are intended to stand for things." Jeremy Taylor and Thomas Browne, two of the accredited masters of style, are also not spared. Shakespeare also comes in for criticism for his disproportionate pomp of diction. In comedies Shakespeare fared better, but the puns and quips could hardly be condoned. "A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it." He even charged Shakespeare with having corrupted language by every mode of depravation. Johnson

perhaps forgot that every age evolved a pattern of style of its own. In the age of correctness, 'good sense and reason, emotion was thrown into the background. Elegance was sought at the expense of passion and sincerity. The Elizabethan age, bubbling with life and enthusiasm evolved a style that was rich and varied in texture, full of passionate intensity and ebullience.

Lyrics had no appeal to Johnson. Even Milton's resonant lines left him cold. In Pope he found the culmination of all that is good and beautiful in poetry. And Matthew Arnold called Pope the classic of our prose, and not the classic of our poetry. Johnson, therefore, was hardly competent to judge the musical cadences of Shakespeare.

Yet it must be admitted that Johnson succeeded in a large measure in overcoming the passions and prejudices of his age. His view in this regard is clearly stated :

"He [ Poet and critic ] must divest himself of the prejudices of his age or country ; he must consider right and wrong in their abstracted and invariable state ; he must disregard present laws and opinions, and rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same".

Unlike most of the neo-classicists Johnson was profoundly influenced by the scientific rationalism of his age. And he could, therefore, often rise above the literary conventions of the day. In most cases he appealed to the court of life and letters. It will be an exaggeration if we say that Johnson had no passions and prejudices. He had too many, and Boswell, in spite of his hero-worshipping spirit, was never tired of enumerating them. But in principle he chose to be guided by reason. "Reason", he said, "wants not Horace to support it". In this respect he presents a striking contrast to Addison. Addison, a true neo-classicist, judged Milton's *Paradise Lost* strictly according to the rules of Aristotle. Johnson subordinated literary conventions and neo-classic rules to life, nature and reason. It appears as if Dryden's mantle fell on Johnson.

Literary rules and conventions were weighed in the balance and found wanting. Johnson must be credited with having brought art and literature to a wider arena. His remarks deserve to be quoted at length :

"Definitions have been no less difficult or uncertain in criticism than in law. Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty,

unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity. There is therefore scarcely any species of writing of which we can tell what is its essence, and what are its constituents; every new genius produces some innovation, which when invented and approved, subverts the rules which the practice of foregoing authors had established."

By running down imagination, Johnson had spared himself the name of a romantic. But his advocacy of liberalism is beyond dispute. He had no patience with the arbitrary edicts of legislators. Nor had he any faith in despotic antiquity. The only rule he liked to observe was the unity of action.

A genius, Johnson believed, was above all rules. Rules are only for the plodding mediocrities. A genius is intellectually superior to the average run of people; and rules are framed for them alone. Rules serve only to reduce a man to the Procrustean mould. "I am persuaded", said Johnson "that, had Sir Isaac Newton applied to poetry he would have made a very fine epic poem. I could as easily apply to law as to tragic poetry." From this it is assumed that given opportunities, Shakespeare could also distinguish himself as a scientist.

This background, we believe, is necessary for understanding Johnson as a Shakespearian critic. Johnson was the sixth editor of Shakespeare. His contributions to textual criticism are great; but greater still are his observations on Shakespeare's dramas. Johnson's eight-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays published in 1765 is a monumental work. Its masterly preface, at once full of concentrated wisdom and sound sense, though not completely free from strange judgements and errors of detail, has become a treasure of Shakespearian criticism. Even as early as 1745 Johnson had a mind to edit a ten-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays. To that end he issued a set of proposals, which appeared as *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*. The proposed ten-volume Shakespeare did not appear. But Johnson, sick of the vagaries of some of his predecessors, wrote an essay on the duties and responsibilities of an editor of Shakespeare, and again proposed to edit Shakespeare himself. It is difficult to account for this delay. For procrastination was not Johnson's vice. But the delay belied popular expectations. The satire of Charles Churchill reflects popular discontent.

He for subscribers baits his hook,  
And takes their cash, but where's the book ?

As Johnson's edition appeared in eight volumes, Shakespeare emerged as an unassailable figure. Though not a romantic, he is credited with the genesis of Shakespeare idolatry. "The poet," said Johnson, "of whose works I have undertaken the revision, may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration." Johnson defended Shakespeare against Voltaire's attacks. "Voltaire expresses his wonder that our author's extravagances are endured by a nation, which has seen the tragedy of *Cato*. Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men. We find in *Cato* innumerable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions ; we place it with the fairest and the noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunction with learning, but *Othello* is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius. *Cato* affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy, elevated and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart ; the composition refers us only to the writer ; we pronounce the name of *Cato*, but we think on Addison."

Johnson, born in the age of prose and reason, could not appreciate the subtleties and nuances of Shakespeare's poetry, but he was nevertheless an able defender of Shakespeare against all the attacks of the neo-classicists. As a textual editor Johnson's contributions are almost inconsequential. His predecessors—Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer and Warburton, all in their own way made some valuable contributions to textual criticism and scholarship. One has to think twice before saying that about Johnson. But Johnson is immortalised for his preface. Boswell's comment deserves to be quoted :

"If it had no other merit but that of producing his preface, in which the excellencies and defects of that immortal bard are displayed with a masterly hand, the nation would have had no reason to complain. A blind indiscriminate admiration of Shakespeare had exposed the British nation to the ridicule of foreigners, Johnson by candidly admitting the faults of his poet, had the more credit in bestowing on him deserved and indisputable praise ; and doubtless none of his panegyrists have done him half



so much honour. What he did as a commentator has no small share of merit, though his researches were not so ample, and his investigations so acute, as they might have been ; which we now certainly know from the labours of other able and ingenious critics who have followed him."

The verdict of posterity has not been changed much. As an editor of Shakespeare, however, Johnson's reputation has waned. His texts are substantially based upon Warburton. His performance judged by the modern standards is "uneven, capricious, and often notably deficient," as Wimsatt would put it. Johnson realised the supreme importance of the first Folio. The first Folio, he boldly asserted, was far more important than the other three Folios.

Johnson was both judicial and judicious in his approach to Shakespeare. Almost nowhere did he pronounce his judgements. He never spoke *ex-cathedra*. In his own way he tried to bring out the significance of a word and interpreted it in as intelligible a manner as possible. As his approach was judicial, he often made necessary emendations. He had a great veneration for Pope as a poet. He had the same veneration for Warburton as an editor. Yet he criticised both and corrected their rasp conjectures. He drew upon his predecessors, and made no secret of it. Atkins is right when he says that Johnson exercised a great "skill with which he opens up new avenues of approach to Shakespeare study by his reasoned treatment and his appeal to first principles."

Johnson spared no pains to present the correct texts of Shakespeare. He was convinced that many errors and misreadings had crept in in the plays. The errors were often due to the not very reliable shorthand reporters. In the process of transcription certain errors crept in. Shakespeare himself also substantially contributed to the confusion. In Shakespeare's age, language was in a hopeless mess. Chaste and colloquial expressions were freely mixed. Shakespeare must have written in haste, and, therefore, he was not very meticulous about the use of language, grammar and imagery. Johnson maintained that Shakespeare's language was "perplexed and obscure," and that obscurity was due to Shakespeare's "fulness of ideas". Shakespeare's brain was teeming with ideas, clamouring for expression, and "the rapidity of his imagination hurried him to a second idea before he had fully expressed the first." Johnson was quite ingenious in his view that Shakespeare cared more for "the series of ideas than of

words, and his language not being designed for the reader's desk' was all that he desired it to be if it conveyed his meaning to his audience." This is quite a plausible explanation.

Always guided by sturdy common sense, Johnson recommended a careful collation of the texts. Let us see if the words make any sense, he argued. There is no point in disturbing the texts only for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense. In the neo-classical age, many attempts were made to refine and reform Shakespeare, and it was a timely warning to those fastidious critics. Scholarship, he conceded, was essential for a Shakespearian critic. But along with scholarship the critics must have a thorough acquaintance with Shakespeare's pattern of thought. A grammarian, philologist or lexicographer was not competent to edit Shakespeare's plays. An editor should avoid personal predilections and conjectural emendations. Conjecture is convenient, but is the bane of an editor. "As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less."

As an editor Johnson's contribution is not great. But as a critic he will stand the test of time. Quite a number of critics of the eighteenth century had a warm appreciation for Shakespeare. Johnson was more appreciative. He lifted the praise a few degrees above the level of the lukewarm tradition. Johnson's contribution is great in the sense that he was a dissenter among the neo-classicists. Le Bossu, Bossuet, Rapin, Boileau and even Aristotle had no terror for him. He believed in the sovereignty of reason and the primacy of common sense. Warm in his praise, he was not a believer in the O! *altitudo sentimentalities* of Carlyle. One who appeals to the court of reason never sentimentalises, never romanticises. In the cold light of reason Johnson analysed and dissected the plays and found beauties as well as faults and defects.

Johnson was happy to note that Shakespeare had become a classic in his life time, and had attained the dignity of an ancient. Essentially a poet of nature, Shakespeare "has long outlived his century." His plays have "past through variations of taste and changes of manners, and as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission." Shakespeare's writings have the stamp of immortality, as in them the poet "holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life." The passions that move his characters are the universal passions—passions that are true of all ages and climes.

In characterisation Shakespeare has shown remarkable skill. There is no touch of theatricality in his dialogues. His speeches are all drawn from life. Shakespeare has a wonderful sense of proportion. Many dramatists exalt the passion of love over every thing else. "Love is only one of many passions ; and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him."

Shakespeare's plays are not strictly speaking, either tragedies or comedies. They are compositions of a distinct kind. In life there are both joy and sorrow, good and evil. "Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition." Critics might reasonably object to it. "But there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature." The mingled drama can instruct as well as please, "Through all these denominations of the drama [Tragedy, Comedy and History] Shakespeare's mode of composition is the same ; an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time, and exhilarated at another. But whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story, without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose ; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without difference."

Shakespeare could write comedies *Con Amore*. His natural disposition led him to comedy. "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct." His genius was essentially comic, and in his own age his comedies were definitely more popular than his tragedies. "In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity, but in his comic scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragic scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action." Johnson's inability to appreciate Shakespeare's tragedies is quite understandable. Unhappy endings found no favour with the Augustans, and tragedies left them cold. And that is why

Johnson was full of warm praise for Tate's adaptation of *King Lear*, according to which Lear was restored to the throne, Cordelia was not hanged but happily married off to Edgar, and everything ended happily. Johnson's subscription to Tate's emendation reflected the general shallowness of thought into which the Augustan critics and writers were apt to fall. The happy ending of *Lear* irritated Lamb. "Why all this pudder and preparation," he cried impatiently, "why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy?" Johnson failed to understand that the travailing of *Lear*, and of the tragic world, for perfection must inevitably lead to tragic waste. *Lear* and Cordelia both must die. For she is no less a tragic character than *Lear*. Cordelia's death is *Lear*'s punishment. On artistic grounds also she must die. In life the innocent often suffer with the guilty. And on spiritual grounds also Cordelia's death is defensible. Towards the end of the play *Lear* triumphed over himself, and the moral universe had triumphed over itself, and Cordelia helps *Lear* achieve this victory. We only regret that Johnson's sturdy common sense made him blind to the beauties of Shakespeare's tragedies, which can be appreciated by men with delicate imaginative sensibilities and a beautiful vision.

Johnson found beauties as well as faults in Shakespeare. His primary fault was that he was a mere entertainer. He wanted to please, but he did not inculcate a moral. Johnson, the stern moralist reprimanded Shakespeare for his sacrificing virtue to convenience. Shakespeare's plays have no poetic justice. There is no just distribution of good and evil. If the function of the writer is to leave the world 'better than he found it, Shakespeare has failed in his mission. Shakespeare has no extenuating circumstances, even though some apologists might try to justify the lack of a moral tone by imputing the fault to the barbarity of the age. Johnson, an ardent believer in good taste and decorum, could not but find fault with Shakespeare.

The plots of the plays are also not what they should be. The endings are untidy. Careless in his designs, his plots are loose and thin. The first and the second parts of the plays are not of the same texture. He begins well and ends abruptly. Shakespeare's themes and some of the characters lack in refinement. Another glaring defect of Shakespeare is that he gives to one age or nation, the customs, institutions and opinions of another. This allegation is perhaps not baseless. For Shakespeare's Venice, Bohemia,



France and Rome are actually Elizabethan England, and the Venetians, Bohemians, the French and the Romans are but the Elizabethans. Shakespeare could not transcend his age. Hector quotes Aristotle; with the story of Theseus and Hippolyta is interwoven the Gothic mythology of the fairies. In short, Shakespeare's plays often betray anachronism.

In comedies Shakespeare is in his elements. Yet the jests are often gross and the pleasantries licentious. Even ladies and gentlemen cannot be distinguished from clowns. For coarseness characterises their speeches. In comedies Shakespeare could not resist the temptation of quibbles—the fatal Cleopatra. His tragedies are laboured and obscure. Shakespeare often falls into bombast. There are, however, scenes full of forceful and striking passions.

So very critical on so many counts, Johnson did not echo the sentiments or criticism of the contemporary neo-classicists. Nowhere did he criticise Shakespeare for violating the unities of time and place. He was extremely liberal when he excused Shakespeare's mingling of the tragic and the comic elements. Johnson was a literary non-conformist. He did not conform to the orthodox creed of the neo-classicists. "All pleasure," Johnson said, "consists in variety." And hence, drama should be a rich fabric, shot with varied tints. Laughter should have tears for its inevitable counterpart. The weight of authority was distinctly against Shakespeare. But Johnson defended Shakespeare as valiantly as Thomas Henry Huxley defended Charles Darwin. Johnson belonged to a "refined" age. The exciting and thrilling incidents in the Shakespearian dramas, Johnson conceded, were very much welcome in the Elizabethan age. The barbarians of the age relished them.

Johnson's criticism is not a mere judicial summary of the critical opinions of the eighteenth century. He had a distinct point of view. Shakespeare's greatness is due to his universality of outlook. Like mighty colossus, Shakespeare bestrides the narrow world. Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature. Taine, the distinguished critic of France once said that race, time and milieu were to be studied while studying an author. Johnson anticipated Taine when he said that Shakespeare should be studied with special reference to his age. Johnson was not the eighteenth century high-brow looking upon the Elizabethan age from his Olympic heights. Johnson is, therefore, not only a judicial but also a historical critic.

Dryden and Johnson had a striking similarity in their Shakespearian criticism. Dryden and Johnson both dwelt at length on the Universality of Shakespeare. Johnson echoed Dryden when he spoke about the gross jests and low buffoonery of the comedies and the rant and bombast of the tragedies. If this be the truth, Johnson's originality has to be sought elsewhere. Johnson's greatness consists in his historic and imaginative perspective. But his failure as a critic consists in his inability to reach the empyrean heights of the poetry of the dramas of Shakespeare which were at once a mirror of life and a mirror of the light that was not on sea or land.



## Eighteenth Century Interpretative and Textual Critics

Thomas Whately will be remembered for his incomplete *Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakspeare*. Though fragmentary, his work is important as it was the first attempt to discuss the problem of characters. "Every play of Shakspeare", said Whately, "abounds with instances of his excellence in distinguishing characters." Whately has his predecessors in this regard, but nobody before him pinpointed the issue. He should also be remembered for his comparative study of the characters of Macbeth and Richard III.

Both Macbeth and Richard were kings ; both waded through blood to the throne. They were placed in similar circumstances. Both had vaulting ambition ; both had superhuman courage, yet their characters are not similar. Macbeth had many human and humane qualities. Warm in his hospitality, he thought twice before lifting the sword. He had the compunctious visitings of nature. Richard, on the other hand, is the embodiment of cruelty and inhumanity in crime. He delights in bloodshed ; he revels in cruelty. Macbeth is in agony to think of the crime. Richard had not ever an iota of conscience. Macbeth at the initial stage was very much conscience-stricken. Both the characters are two chunks of life ; but the character of Macbeth is more subtly drawn as he is more complex.

William Richardson is at once a classicist and a romanticist in his Shakespearian criticism. In his *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakspeare's Remarkable Characters* Richardson made poetry subservient to philosophy. He also emphasised characters. "No writer," said Richardson, "has hitherto appeared who possesses in a more eminent degree than Shakspeare, the power of imitating the passions. All of them seem familiar to him ; the boisterous no less than the gentle ; the benign no less than the malignant." "He is classical in his matter," says Halliday, "in his insistence on Shakspeare's genius as a creator of character, romantic in his manner, in analysing

the characters in greater detail." Richardson's predecessors wrote essays on Shakespeare. Richardson wrote a book—the first book ever written on Shakespeare. It has already been pointed out that the eighteenth century critics subordinated the aesthetic aspect of drama to the moral. To them literature was but lay scripture. Richardson could not outgrow the limitations of his age. He regarded Shakespeare's plays as a vast storehouse of morals, and he endeavoured to evolve from them a code of conduct.

Joseph Trapp and William Guthrie recognised the genius of Shakespeare. They, however, complained that his plays were not artistically constructed.

William Kenrick published his *Review of Dr. Johnson's new edition of Shakespeare ; in which the Ignorance, or Inattention of the Editor is exposed*. He defended Shakespeare against the criticism of Johnson and Warburton. To that end he issued a set of proposals for editing Shakespeare. The pledge, however, was not redeemed.

Edward Capell is the seventh editor of Shakespeare. A greater scholar than all his predecessors in the field, Capell wanted to publish a definitive edition of Shakespeare, so that future editors might not indulge in vagaries like Rowe and Hanmer. He described his own editorial method :

"Hereupon he [Capell] possessed himself of the other modern editions, the Folios, and as many Quartos as could presently be procured ; and, within a few years after, fortune and industry helped him to all the rest, six only excepted ; adding to them withal twelve more, which the compilers of former tables had no knowledge of. Thus furnished he fell immediately to collation,—which is the first step in works of this nature ; and, without it nothing is done to purpose,—first of moderns with moderns, then of moderns with ancients, and afterwards of ancients with others more ancient... He had not proceeded far in his collation, before he saw cause to come to this resolution ;—to stick invariably to the old editions (that is, the best of them), which hold now the place of manuscripts."

Capell was honest and assiduous. He transcribed Shakespeare's works for ten times. And his labour was amply repaid. He spared no pains to collate all the Quartos, which had been thrown into disrepute. His ten-volume edition of Shakespeare is a testimony to his profound scholarship and critical acumen. He unearthed the materials of the past. Today even an ordinary student knows that



Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, Henslowe's *Diary* and the *Stationers' Register* are contemporary records of supreme importance. But in Capell's time these treasure troves were lost in the quarry. Capell dug out the past and brought into focus all these valuable but neglected records, hitherto undivined.

Capell's life was dedicated to the exploration of Shakespeare, and his life was one of unremitting toil. Even after the publication of his edition of Shakespeare he went on working with indefatigable energy. And the result was *Notes and Various Readings* and *The school of Shakespeare*. Not satisfied with what he had done, he wanted to compile a standard biography of Shakespeare. Rowe's biography did not please him. For it was a strange medley of fact and fiction. And hence it was almost his dying testament when he wrote about this subject :

"The subject is certainly a good one, and will fall (we hope) ere it be long into the hands of some good writer."

Capell was a scholar as well as a critic. His remarks on the characters of Falstaff and Cleopatra are notable, both of whom are artistic *tour de force*. With unerring insight Capell found sweet tenderness and delicacy of feeling in the relation between King Lear and his fool. Yet as a critic Capell was not very successful. For he cared only for the chunks, and not the dramas as a whole.

George Steevens, the eighth editor published his ten-volume edition of Shakespeare. His edition is modelled on Johnson's. But he had scholarship, while Johnson had expression. Steevens had a thorough acquaintance with the Elizabethan world, and therefore, he was not a man to be deluded by the meretricious glamour of the Folios. Johnson, Capell, Steevens and Malone belong to a coterie for their adherence to the Quartos. Malone often collaborated with him.

But Steevens completely forgot the help offered so liberally, and out of sheer spite and jealousy, published towards the close of his life, his fifteen-volume edition of Shakespeare only to hold a candle to Malone's shame. But in reality he held a candle to his own shame. His notes and emendations which had once enriched the ten-volume edition, are often replaced ; and the new notes and emendations of the fifteen-volume edition became erratic, so much so, that they earned him the title of "the puck of commentators". It is superfluous to explain that Puck, the mischievous fairy in *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* revelled in

mischief-mongering. Two innocent clergymen—John Collins and Richard Amner were pilloried for certain interpretations of Shakespeare. Steevens was bitter in his attacks and malicious in his tone.

Steevens was a scholar, but he was not a sound critic. The witchery of Shakespeare's poetry had no appeal to him. The delicacies of colour and the untranslatable beauties and nuances of poetry could not stir his feelings. His verdict on Shakespeare's poetry is at once amusing and shocking :

"The strongest act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service."

Steevens was not bound by Neo-classical dogmas. He had no poetic sensibility. As a dramatist Shakespeare had heavenly gifts. His dialogues were dramatic and embraced all the passions of the human heart. But his narrative poetry is not poetry worth the name. The sonnets of Shakespeare were to him, full of "Quaintness, obscurity, and tautology."

Edmond Malone and George Steevens are eminent Shakespearian scholars, whose works deserve to be studied together. They worked in collaboration and one's works supplemented those of the other. Steevens in the second edition of his Shakespeare's plays, incorporated Malone's *Attempt to ascertain the order in which the plays of Shakespeare were written*. Malone helped Steevens in a thousand and one ways. He edited two volumes of Steevens' Shakespeare. Later, however, there was an estrangement between the two, and Malone thought it worth while to publish independently his ten-volume edition of Shakespeare. It has already been pointed out that Steevens published his fifteen-volume edition of Shakespeare only to give people the impression that in point of scholarship he had completely outshone Malone. Malone till his death was engaged upon a new edition of Shakespeare, which, however, appeared only after his death.

Capell, Steevens and Malone formed a triumvirate in the world of scholarship. Of them Malone's contributions were decidedly the greatest. Boswell did not exaggerate when he said that "his text is beyond all comparison, the most faithful that had yet been produced." Boswell was a competent judge, for he had published Malone's twentyone-volume variorum edition of Shakespeare. Rowe is always credited with being the first biographer of Shakespeare. Malone brought out the standard biography of the poet, which all his successors had to draw liberally upon.

It will not be out of place if we give a resume of the specific work done by the eighteenth century scholars. Johnson, Capell, Steevens and Malone were all endowed with historic imagination. Today the field of Shakespearian scholarship has widened beyond all proportions and has become an industry. But the foundation stone was laid by the eighteenth century Titans.

A little preliminary knowledge is necessary for understanding the editorial problems and how the editors sought to solve them. Before the publication of the first Folio edition in 1623, there were Quartos of Shakespeare's works ; some were good Quartos, and some bad. The editors of the first Folio—Heminge and Condell claimed to have published the first definitive edition of Shakespeare, and in their opinion, the Quartos were unreliable as they were "surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors." Later editors shared their optimism. They were sceptic, and scepticism is the way to scholarship. They began to collate different texts. Collation means the comparison of different readings of the same text. Ben Jonson edited his own works ; and normally variants in readings are not possible there. But in Shakespeare the problem is acute. For his plays were often left to the vagaries of the unscrupulous short-hand reporters, and hence Shakespeare's works were pirated.

The editors sought to ascertain the correct texts of Shakespeare. The editors of the second, third and fourth Folios tried their best to arrive at a logical conclusion. Rowe's edition was based on the fourth Folio. Pope in his turn based his text on Rowe's edition. Theobald based his text on Pope's edition. Hanmer and Warburton based their texts upon the editions of Pope and Theobald. So far so good. But Capell for the first time realised that the definitive edition of Shakespeare could not be compiled along these lines. It was a mere wild goose chase. He perceived the difference between the manuscript texts and the printed books. He also realised the stupidity of collating text of a later date than the first Folio. Capell and Malone were of the opinion that all the Quartos were not of the same importance and reliability. They rejected some, and accepted a few. Pollard in the twentieth Century called the rejected stuff "bad Quartos", and the accepted ones, "good Quartos".

Besides collation, elucidation is another necessary qualification for an editor. Johnson and Theobald realised this and elucidated

Shakespeare's works. Theobald was eminently competent for this arduous task. "If Shakespeare is worth reading," said Theobald "he is worth explaining." Only a man having a thorough acquaintance with Elizabethan life and letters was competent to write explanatory notes, and Theobald had the competence. Theobald paved the way, and Johnson walked along his lines. Johnson with his prodigious grasp over the subject, his command over the language and massive and vigorous intellect gave new interpretations to the recondite passages.

Johnson is the pioneer, but Capell, Steevens and Malone were undoubtedly better scholars. Capell also elucidated the passages, but his notes appeared separately. With a little pride and self-confidence Malone said that the Eighteenth century Shakespearian scholars explained Shakespeare and made him understood. It was not an unreasonable claim. Yet he believed in the petty done and was conscious of the undone vast. And that is why he again said that the future Shakespearian scholars should not be very optimistic, but forge their way ahead. They should work hard until Shakespeare's "entire library shall have been discovered and the fables of all his plays traced to their origin and sources." It may, however, be said incidentally that despite the splendid work done by so many Shakespearian scholars and annotators, Shakespeare still smiles enigmatically like Mona Lisa and "Outtops our knowledge."

Malone outshone his compeers. "If Johnson is the culmination of the earlier school of eighteenth century editors", says D. Nichol Smith, "Malone is the culmination of the later. He is more : he remains the greatest of all our Shakespearian scholars." For his contributions were truly great. He was the first biographer of Shakespeare, and not Rowe, whose twenty or twenty-five pages are a series of anecdotes, and like all anecdotes, are fictitious or gross exaggeration. He tried to ascertain the order in which the plays of Shakespeare were written. Tireless in his researches, he wrote the history of the Elizabethan stage in his *History of the Stage*. Today E. K. Chambers' massive four-volume *Elizabethan Stage* seems to be the indispensable companion of the students of Elizabethan drama. But how many remember that Malone in this regard is the pioneer ?

"Malone", says Ralli, "is a landmark in verbal criticism". He tried to trace to their original sources the plots of Shakespeare's dramas. He tried to throw light on every obscure passage. He



in his own way explained every allusion that might present a difficulty. So very equipped for verbal criticism, Malone did not succeed in the same measure in aesthetic and interpretative criticism. Aesthetic criticism demands imaginative sensibility and delicate responsiveness. And Malone had neither. Yet he defended *Venus and Adonis* against Steevens' attack. Shakespeare's dramatic quality, Malone maintained, was a gift from heaven. But as a narrative poet he had his equals. He also defended Shakespeare's sonnets against Steevens' attack. They were not to him "a mass of affectation, pedantry, circumlocution, and nonsense". But he complained at the same time that the sonnets lacked in variety. It also baffled him that the sonnets were addressed to a man—quite an unconventional thing for any sonneteer. Malone in his *Dissertation on Henry VI* anticipated the disintegrators of Shakespeare. He was convinced that all the three parts of *Henry VI* were not by Shakespeare. He subjected the play to verse-tests and traced the hands of Peele, Greene and Lodge in the first part of the drama.

Malone's contribution was remarkable. And he ably summed up the contributions of his contemporaries :

"An ardent desire to understand and explain his [Shakespeare's] works is, to the honour of the present age, so much increased within the last forty years, that more has been done towards their elucidation, during that period, than in a century before. All the ancient copies of his plays, hitherto discovered, have been collated with the most scrupulous accuracy. The meaniest books have been carefully examined, only because they were of the age in which he lived, and might happily throw a light on some forgotten custom, or obsolete phraseology : and, this object being still kept in view, the toil of wading through all such reading as was never read has been cheerfully endured, because no labour was thought too great, that might enable us to add one new laurel to the father of our drama. Almost every circumstance that tradition or history has preserved relative to him, has been investigated, and laid before the public.

## *Maurice Morgann and the First Foot Fall of Romanticism*

Maurice Morgann ordered before his death all he had written to be destroyed ; but the students of Shakespeare are grateful to him that his famous Essay on the *Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* escaped the flames. Aristotle called a plot the soul of the drama. He also emphasised that drama was principally a matter of action. The romantic dramatists as well as critics deviated from the Aristotelian principle and developed an almost inordinate and disproportionate interest in character. Morgann is romantic in the sense that he emphasised the importance of Falstaff's character. He is truly the forerunner of the romantic criticism of Shakespeare. Himself a great lover of life and gaiety, Johnson felt drawn to Falstaff's gaiety. But he saw with no regret Falstaff leaving the court of Henry V in utter disgrace. He found no redeeming feature in Falstaff's character. A moralist cannot love a liar and a coward. Morgann also defended the rejection of Falstaff. Johnson with all his massive intellect could not analyse Falstaff's character. But the Romantic critic could. In his discerning and sympathetic analysis Morgann convincingly presented the complex character of the fat old man. He had his vices but vices are not what he should be judged by. Behind this exterior that will repel the moralists, there is something that compels admiration, if not love. Morgann did not care to know if the unities had been scrupulously observed. Action and plot were to him of no moment. He found the essence of drama in characterisation. The inmost recesses of the mind were laid bare and analysed with utmost sympathy.

In the rich gallery of portraits shaped by the splendid creative genius of Shakespeare, Falstaff occupies a unique position. Hazlitt calls him "the most substantial comic character that ever was invented." "There is more wit in a single joke of Falstaff than in all the jokes which men treasure through a lifetime," says Walter Bagehot. Today Falstaff has his warm

friends and admirers. But to Maurice Margann should go the credit for Falstaff's popularity. A critic has rightly said about Margann's essay on Falstaff that it is "a more honourable monument to the memory of Shakespeare than has been reared by the united labours of his commentators." Never did an advocate marshal his arguments with greater sincerity or warmth when he was pleading for Falstaff. Bradley's essay on the "Rejection of Falstaff" is a variation on the same theme.

Johnson regarded Falstaff's vices as "contemptible rather than detestable." He has been charged with lying and cowardice. According to Morgann, "Falstaff's courage stands upon the ground of natural courage or common sense." "I am to avow", said Morgann, "that I do not clearly discern that Sir John Falstaff deserves to bear the character so generally given him of an absolute coward ; or, in other words, that I do not conceive, Shakespeare ever meant to make cowardice an essential part of his constitution." He found constitutional bravery in his composition. Morgann emphasised the fact that a charge of the infantry was obtained for him by prince Hal, and remarked, "we might venture to infer from this that a prince of so great ability whose wildness was only external and assumed, would not have procured in so nice and critical a juncture a charge of foot for a known coward." Again Morgann said, "The admission of Falstaff into the royal presence does not seem an indecorum. In camp there is but one virtue and vice, military ability must swallow up or cover all." Morgann believed that "Falstaff was a wit as well as a soldier ; and his courage however eminent was but the accessory : his wit was the principal." Morgann was the last man to think that Falstaff had a taint of cowardice. Falstaff gave a bottle of wine to prince Hal even in the battlefield. A man with remarkably strong nerves can indulge in jokes and fun, when the air is thick with shrieks and groans of the dying, and the pall of death hanging overhead. But when Falstaff avoids fighting with Douglas, Morgann was really at a loss, and he did not know how to defend him. Falstaff feigned death, and Morgann at once shifted his ground. He then called Falstaff a buffoon. And hence Falstaff refuses to be reduced to a formula. For he is as complex a character as Hamlet. Falstaff is a bundle of inconsistencies, and Morgann knew it. So he concluded : He is a man at once young and old, enterprising and fat, a dupe and a wit, harmless, wicked, weak in principle and resolute by constitution, ... a knave without malice, a liar

without deceit, and a knight, a gentleman, and a soldier, without either dignity, decency or honour."

Morgann has presented a complex character, at once understandable and ineffable. Morgann's method is to look "to the spirit rather than the letter of what is uttered, and relying at last only on a combination of the whole." Morgann was a romantic, because he was the first critic to discern certain roundness and integrity in the forms of Shakespeare which gives them an independence. Bradley gave a formal recognition of his gratitude to his predecessor when he said that "there is no better piece of Shakespeare criticism in the World." Morgann laid the foundation of romantic criticism and Lamb, Hazlitt, Coleridge and De Quincey raised mighty superstructures.

Even if Morgann had failed to defend Falstaff, he should be credited with having inaugurated a new era in Shakespearian criticism. It would be wrong to assume that Morgann had painted a pen portrait of Falstaff and had done nothing else. In fact, he has done something more, for in his own words, "Falstaff is the word but Shakespeare is the theme." In fact, the sympathetic and imaginative analysis of Falstaff's character helps understand the technique of Shakespeare's characterisation. There are principally two methods of estimating the characters of Shakespeare. First, the characters speak and the readers and the audience can make an assessment about them. Secondly, we can form an opinion about the characters from what is being said by others about them. In that case they play the part of the chorus as their speeches are actually comments on the characters. Morgann applied both the methods in delineating Falstaff's character. From what the other characters speak about Falstaff, it appears that he is not a coward.

Falstaff, we have already said, is a bundle of contradictions. Shakespeare has a subtle art of presenting a character. To call Falstaff a coward is not enough. For that is not the essence of his character. And this essence, one can only feel but not understand. For Morgann himself said that the Shakespearian characters were struck-out whole by some happy art which the critic himself could not understand.



## *Romantic Criticism of Shakespeare*

The eighteenth century critics, at least some of them, anticipated many things said by the Romantic critics. Hazlitt once said that he had taken Shakespeare seriously, because he loved and admired him. In the eighteenth century there were critics to admire Shakespeare, but none loved him as warmly and passionately as the Romantic critics of the nineteenth century. Love makes one blind to the faults, and even the faults are invested with glory and glamour.

Romanticism has been variously defined. It is liberalism in literature. It is the awakening of imaginative sensibility. It is the liberation of the ego. Imagination and subjectivity became the watchwords of the day. Formal rules and dogmas were thrown overboard. In the romantic age Shakespeare was lifted from the earthly plane. He became a god, and his works became the Bible, the Gospel of the age. In Germany, France and England the romantic critics were full of praise and love for Shakespeare, bordering on worship. Victor Hugo heightened the note. Shakespeare was enshrined, and the criticism of the age in many cases became hymns of adoration. Criticism was synonymous with hallelujah. Even in the twentieth century the echoes of romanticism can be distinctly heard.

We should do well to trace the history of the romantic forerunners of Germany who paved the way for Lamb, Hazlitt, Coleridge and De Quincey. The works of the Schlegel brothers of Germany, Wordsworth and Coleridge in England, Victor Hugo and Madame de Staël in France are popularly known as the landmarks of romantic criticism. There was a general European Romantic movement in the early nineteenth century for the rejection of the neo-classical creed. Diderot of France and Herder of Germany initiated the movement. There is, however, a general impression that the Romantic criticism of Shakespeare has been inspired by the German critics. Gervinus goes so far as to suggest that Shakespeare was discovered by the German critic Lessing. But the fact remains that great as he is as a critic of letters, as a Shakespearian critic he is rather disappointing. For

he echoes the sentiments of Dryden only. Even in his *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* his discussions of Shakespearian plays are not warmly appreciative. He, however, did one thing remarkable. Himself a great classical scholar, Lessing gave Shakespeare the imprimatur to have his own way. Shakespeare need not, Lessing asserted, follow the rules of Aristotle. According to Hamann, another notable German critic, Shakespeare is synonymous with genius. Herder believed that Shakespeare was an inspired genius and a follower of nature. In his essay on Shakespeare, Herder was rhapsodical about the poet. He conjured up in a vision the glorious figure of Shakespeare sitting on a rock, his head touching heaven, and his feet touching the elements. Herder brusquely set aside the vexed question of the unities. He maintained that the Nordic Drama should be different from the Athenian drama. The Greek drama owed its origin to the chorus, and hence, the unities were essential. But Shakespeare's dramas are the "dark little symbols of an outline for a theodicy." A poet is a "dramatic God." He has to build his own world, and a world cannot be made to order.

Goethe, "the greatest critic of all ages" in the words of Sainte-Beuve, was out and out a follower of Herder in his adoration of Shakespeare. He wrote :

"The first page I read of him made me his own for life, and when had finished the first play I stood there as a man born-blind to whom a miraculous hand had returned sight in an instant... The unity of place seemed to me narrow as a prison, the unities of time and action obnoxious chains for our imagination... Shakespeare's theatre is a beautiful peepshow, in which the history of the world passes by our eyes on the invisible thread of time." Again Goethe went into raptures : "Nature ! Nature ! Nothing is as much Nature as Shakespeare's men." Even after Goethe's conversion to classicism, his remarks on Shakespeare were equally worshipful.

"He was no playwright ; he had never thought of the stage ; it was far too narrow for his great mind."

The Schlegel brothers—Friedrich and August Wilhelm made substantial contributions to Romantic criticism. Friedrich was drawn to Shakespeare very early. *Hamlet* as a philosophical tragedy was his passion. He rhapsodised over Shakespeare's plays.

A. W. Schlegel described Shakespeare as a "deep thinking artist." He outright rejected Aristotelian rules. He went so far

as to suggest that Aristotle had no idea about tragedy at all. His observations on Greek drama and modern drama deserve to be quoted at length :

In Greek art and poetry there is an original unconscious unity of form and matter ; in the modern, so far as they have remained true to their peculiar spirit, a more intimate penetration of both as two opposites is sought for. The Greeks solved their task to perfection ; the moderns can satisfy their striving for the infinite only by approximation." Schlegel also strongly defended the mixture of the tragic and the comic elements. For in his opinion Romantic drama was drama, and was neither a tragedy nor a comedy. Shakespeare seems to be Schlegel's love. He translated seventeen plays into German. He dwelt at length on all the plays of Shakespeare in his Vienna lectures. Shakespeare, he maintained, is not a mere force of nature, a natural phenomenon ; Shakespeare is a conscious artist. Shakespeare is an "abyss of deliberateness, self-consciousness, and reflection."

"If we wish," said Bowra, "to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance they attached to imagination and in the special view they held of it." But to understand the romantic criticism of Shakespeare, we must not seek its essence only in imagination. Characterisation is the hard cote of romantic criticism. Most of the romantic critics have neglected plots, style, versification and language. Characterisation and sometimes poetry figure prominently in their criticism. To these critics all the characters of Shakespeare are living and pulsating. They are individualised. The so-called minor characters are not minor, for each of them has achieved a major significance. They were never tired of telling that each character could be distinguished from the rest. They were not satisfied with what the characters did or said on the stage. In order to have a glance at a full-length personality, the critics must see the characters on the stage as well as off the stage. Here imagination comes to the aid of the critics. The romantic critics believe that Shakespeare has created a world which is far from the madding crowd of ignoble strife. This world is the world of imagination. But the inmates of the world are living beings. The romantic critics can never think that the characters are also the creations of imagination.

The function of the romantic critics was to enter the enchanted

world created by the poets and playwrights. If the neo-classicists wanted to judge and assess Shakespeare with the help of reason, the romantic critics wanted to apprehend with the help of imagination.

Romantic criticism is impressionistic or aesthetic criticism. But whenever subjectivity is predominant criticism is often apt to be erratic and individualistic. A critic has rightly observed that romantic criticism is often too romantic, and, therefore, not reliable. Croce, whose opinions we must always value, complained that the romantic critics of Shakespeare were exclamatory in their attitude. It was more idolatry than criticism; it was worship and not judgment. The critics were unqualified in their assessment. Scholarship was absolutely necessary for an eighteenth century critic. The romantic critics might have had scholarship, but it was never put under contribution. Judicial criticism was given the go-by. In its place came aesthetic criticism. Verbal criticism was never spoken of. The critics showed no interest in the collation of the texts. To the romantic critics, actability or stage-worthiness of a drama was of no moment. They were enraptured, feasted, fed by the magic of poetry. A Drama, to them, was literature. It was poetry. To them the natural magic of poetry had its irresistible appeal. Shakespeare's dramas appeared to them as closet-dramas, to be read, recited or sung. Dramatic art left them cold. They had no interest whatever in the Elizabethan stage conditions. Along with poetry there was an added interest in the psychological studies of the characters. They judged the parts, but could not judge the whole. A work of art is to be judged as a whole. The critics unfortunately had no architectonic faculty, with which one can size up the different dimensions of a work of art. And we know, Shakespeare's dramas are multidimensional.

Subjectivity, useful as it is for a critic, is nevertheless dangerous when carried too far. Some advocates have called romantic criticism "creative criticism" on the ground that the critics have re-created the original in their alembic of fancy. At times they are completely detached from the original. They become intensely personal. Their own passions and prejudices, likes and dislikes, tastes and predilections blur their critical vision. It is themselves they portray. They delineate their varying moods. As these subjective critics record their personal feelings, their writings are quite pleasant. For in them we hear the heart-beats of the critics.



We do not read, we touch the men. But we do not know how far they are criticism worth the name.

Romantic criticism is open to several other objections. The critics often call certain characters romantic and poetical. They forget that these characters are in themselves lifeless. It is Shakespeare who has instilled life into them. And not merely life, but poetry as well. But it is Shakespeare who is poetical, and not the characters. Then again, the romantic critics pinpoint characterisation and poetry of the drama. They completely forget that the drama is meant to be acted. Walter Raleigh has ably summed up the case against romantic criticism in his *Six Essays on Johnson* :

The romantic attitude begins to be fatiguing. The great romantic critics, when they are writing at their best, do succeed in communicating to their reader those thrills of wonder and exaltation which they felt in contact with Shakespeare's imaginative work. This is not a little thing to do ; but it cannot be done continuously, and it has furnished the workaday critic with a vicious model. There is a taint of insincerity about romantic criticism, from which not even the great romantics are free. They are never in danger from the pitfalls that waylay the plodding critic ; but they are always falling upward, as it were into vacuity. They love to lose themselves in O altitudo. From the most worthless material they will fashion a new hasty altar to the unknown God. When they are inspired by their divinity they say wonderful things ; when the inspiration fails them their language is maintained at the same height, and they say more than they feel. You can never be sure of them." How bitter, and yet how true !

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is not only the greatest critic of the nineteenth century but also one of the greatest critics of the world. T. S. Eliot who often throws established reputation off the pedestal, calls Coleridge "perhaps the greatest of English critics, and in a sense the last." Saintsbury, whose acquaintance with European criticism, is extraordinary, asserts that "there abide these three, Aristotle, Longinus, and Coleridge." Herbert Read regards Coleridge "as head and shoulders above every other English critic." Yet there is no denying the fact that Coleridge was largely indebted to the German critics Schelling, Kant and A. W. Schlegel. Hazlitt once complained that the indebtedness of the romantic criticism to Germany was often wrongly emphasised.

But the facts cannot be ignored. For Coleridge himself said about Schelling: "It will be happiness and honour enough, should I succeed in rendering the system itself intelligible to my countrymen." When charged with plagiarism, he asserted that he was not indebted to Schlegel for his remark, "Shakespeare's judgment is equal to his genius". "Assuredly", continued Coleridge, "that criticism of Shakespeare will alone be genial which is reverential. The Englishman, who without reverence, a proud and affectionate reverence, can utter the name of William Shakespeare, stands disqualified for the office of critic." It is not on record if Coleridge read Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*. But the seminal ideas of Schlegel and Coleridge are sometime strikingly similar. Schlegel said about *Hamlet*, "Shakespeare knew more of his *Hamlet* than he was conscious of." Friedrich Schlegel interpreted *Hamlet*'s character and called him an intellectual. And so did Coleridge. We wonder if we could brush aside the similarity and conclude that great minds often think alike. T. M. Raysor tells us that Coleridge never heard of Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* before 12 December, 1811. Coleridge delivered his first lectures in January, 1808. From Henry Crabb Robinson's diary it appears that Coleridge discussed Schlegel's views with him. Is it a lapse of memory, we wonder? It is now an incontestable fact that Coleridge liberally drew upon Schlegel and Schelling. Rene Wellek clinches the issue and says:

"The distinction between symbol and allegory can be found in Schelling and Goethe, the distinction between genius and talent in Kant, the distinctions between organic and mechanical, classical and modern, statuesque and picturesque in A. W. Schlegel. Coleridge's particular use of the term 'idea' comes from the Germans, and the way in which he links imagination with the process of cognition is also clearly derived from Fichte and Schelling."

It would, however, be wrong to assume that Coleridge is a mere echo or carbon copy of the German critics and philosophers. A great poet, Coleridge maintained, is a genius. He should have passion, good sense, fancy, imagination and judgment. Shakespeare had all these qualifications in a large measure. Coleridge did not believe that a great poet should have only genius and imagination. He should have talent and fancy as well. Genius and talent, imagination and fancy are not conflicting but complementary to

each other. Coleridge found a happy blending of these faculties in Shakespeare.

As a verbal critic Coleridge with all his profound learning was an utter failure. His textual emendations and verbal interpretations are a mere child's play compared with those of Capell, Steevens and Malone. In his emphasis on characterisation he was in line with Morgann and Richardson. Coleridge's Shakespearian criticism was desultory and fragmentary. At places he was hardly critical. But he was the initiator of a movement in England, the war-cry of which was that "the Judgement of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius." The eighteenth century critics almost without any exception cared little for Shakespeare's poetry. Coleridge drew the attention of the readers to the lilt of his poetry. His *Biographia Literaria* and *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare* are two important landmarks in Shakespearian criticism. Halliday rightly says that "it is Coleridge above all others who is the interpreter of Shakespeare, the inspired critic who revealed for the first time the immense range of Shakespeare's genius, and pointed out the innumerable and previously undiscovered approaches to an appreciation of it."

The critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not all critical of Shakespeare. In spite of their neo-classical bias they had occasionally some words of praise for Shakespeare. But the words of praise were punctuated with "ifs" and "buts". Even those who had unqualified praise were often speaking apologetically as if they were defending Shakespeare. Coleridge was the first English critic who praised ungrudgingly. In his criticism he had a distinctly philosophical method. Unlike most of his predecessors who are credited with the criticism of mere craftsmanship and technique, he with the mantle of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Tieck and Novalis upon him, gave an entirely new direction in literary criticism. And that direction is philosophical. It was this method that enabled him to trace in Shakespeare "that just proportion, that union and interpenetration, of the universal and particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science."

This philosophical method is manifest in his famous definition of Imagination :

"The *primary* imagination, the living power and prime Agent of all human perception ;

'the *Secondary* imagination, an echo of the primary, co-existing

with the conscious will, yet still identical with the primary in the *Kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation ;

‘and finally the *fancy*, no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and place, blended with and modified by the empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word *choice*’.”

Shakespeare, Coleridge believed, had more of this *Imagination*, as a shaping power, than perhaps any other artist. Shakespeare with his creative imagination has embodied all the diverse elements of perception and synthesised them into supreme works of arts. Coleridge, who yielded to none in his appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry said that Wordsworth was undoubtedly the greatest poet of his age. Wordsworth has imagination, but not that imagination which can fuse, melt and recombine the varied and apparently incoherent elements of perception. That is why Shakespeare is a greater artist than Wordsworth. Both Shakespeare and Wordsworth are poet-philosophers. But Shakespeare can bring about a synthesis of nature and art, genius and judgment—an artistic feat of which Wordsworth was not capable. T. M. Raysor is right when he observes that Coleridge with his psychological analysis of characters and wide learning lent to his criticism dignity and a philosophical scope. It has become almost a platitude in criticism to say that Coleridge owed his philosophical attitude to Kant and Schelling. Assuming it to be true, we cannot but praise Coleridge for his individual critical perceptions and penetrating analyses of the characters. Even this does not complete the picture. Coleridge's great contribution is his recognition of a sense of mystery in the works of Shakespeare. The neo-classicists looked at everything with the cold light of reason. Man, therefore, became a microcosm, and in the garish light of the day there was nothing vague, nothing mysterious. To Coleridge, man was invested with glory, and life was like a dome of many-coloured glass, at once enchanting and elusive. The deep, impenetrable mysteries of life defy any analysis or any rough-and-ready solution. According to Coleridge, Shakespeare is a philosophical poet. A poet and a philosopher have similar traits. For both have an utter aloofness from those of which they are the painters and the analysts. Coleridge completely identified himself with Shakespeare, and yet his criticism is not mere sentimental effusion.



Coleridge defined poetry in his *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare* as "an art of representing in words, external nature and human thoughts and affections, by the production of as much immediate pleasure in parts, as is compatible with the largest sum of pleasure in the whole". This definition, Coleridge maintained, is very much applicable to Shakespeare's dramas. "Clothed in radiant armour, and authorized by titles sure and manifold, as a poet, Shakespeare came forward to demand the throne of fame, as the dramatic poet of England. His excellencies compelled even his contemporaries to seat him on that throne, although there were giants in those days contending for the same honour." Shakespeare has been applauded in Germany and denigrated in France only because he did not observe the unities. The French critics forget that the unities might be essential for the ancient Greek drama, but in modern dramas they are anachronism.

Shakespeare's characters are all true to nature. They are also the creations of his meditation. Shakespeare has often been charged with having used puns and conceits. These critics forget that puns and conceits were in vogue in the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare has sometimes been charged with immorality and indecency. These critics have miserably failed to distinguish between manners and morals. What appeared immoral to them was but the peculiar manners of the age. Coleridge then dwelt at length on the various excellences of *Romeo and Juliet*. The characters in the play are all individualised. Shakespeare with his psychological insight has plumbed the depths of the human mind. *The Tempest* is a splendid expression of Shakespeare's poetic imagination. A vital writer that Shakespeare is, he has presented a gallery of men, and not of puppets. Each scene of the play is a picture. Each scene is also a song, such is the musicality of his poetry.

In his estimate of Hamlet, Coleridge anticipated Bradley. It has often been said that Coleridge owed to Schlegel. He was particularly indebted to Schlegel for his analysis of Hamlet's character. It should, however, be conceded that Coleridge amplified the seminal idea of Schlegel. "In Hamlet," Coleridge said, "I conceive Shakespeare to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to outward objects and our meditation on inward thoughts—due balance between the real and the imaginary world". Hamlet is an

intellectual, but he has no power to act. That accounts for his tragedy.

Coleridge discussed several other aspects of Shakespeare in his *Biographia Literaria* and *Table Talk*. He paid his glowing tributes to Shakespeare by calling him "the greatest genius" and a "myriad minded" poet.

Charles Lamb wrote very little about Shakespeare, but the little he wrote is to be measured in terms of gold. Romantic critics normally are effusive, and, therefore, they write at length. Lamb is an honourable exception. His essay *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage Representation* is the only mentionable thing he wrote on Shakespeare. His *specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare* served to rouse popular interest in the Elizabethan drama, long buried in oblivion. This book deals with Shakespeare's contemporaries, but there is practically nothing about Shakespeare. Lamb and his sister Mary wrote *Tales founded on the Plays of Shakespeare*, and Shakespeare was no longer caviare for the general. Children passed sleepless nights over the tales.

Lamb as a Shakespearian critic holds a very high position, because of his delicate responsiveness. Coleridge, therefore, said, "Compare Charles Lamb's exquisite criticisms on Shakespeare with Hazlitt's round and round imitations of them". Lamb's criticism is "exquisite", and nobody will contest the truth. But Coleridge's strictures on Hazlitt must make us pause. For Hazlitt is decidedly the greatest Shakespearian critic of his age.

Lamb's criticism is impressionistic. He could very well say like Hazlitt, "I say what I think : I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things ; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are." Lamb and Hazlitt cared more for feeling than thinking. The mantle of Longinus had fallen upon them, and they did not know it. Lamb initiated the movement of enjoying a work of art without caring for theoretical abstractions. That is why E. M. W. Tillyard said in his introduction to *Lamb's Literary Criticism*, that "of English masters of theoretical criticism Coleridge is the greatest, of applied, in a sense, Lamb".

In his *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage Representation*, Lamb's contention was that the "Plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any dramatist whatever." "To know",

said Lamb, "the internal workings and movements of a great mind, of an Othello or a Hamlet for instance, the *when* and the *why* and the *how far* they should be moved ; to what pitch a passion is becoming ; to give the reins and to pull in the curb exactly at the moment when the drawing in or the slackening is most graceful ; seems to demand a reach of intellect of a vastly different extent from that which is employed upon the bare imitation of the signs of these passions in the countenance or gesture, which signs are usually observed to be most lively and emphatic in the weaker sort of minds, and which signs can after all but indicate some passion, as I said before, anger, or grief, generally ; but of the motives and grounds of the passion, wherein it differs from the same passion in low and vulgar natures, of these the actor can give no more idea by his face or gesture than the eye (without a metaphor) can speak, or the muscles utter intelligible sounds." What did Lamb precisely aim at ? He wanted the freedom of imagination. A play when acted on the stage evokes certain feelings in the minds of the spectators. But as the play is being read as a closet-drama, the imagination of the readers runs riot. The readers soar in the realm of imagination like enchanted Pegasus. The stage-representation of a play, however skilful and artistic, cripples our imagination. It is like Wordsworth's Yarrow unvisited. As long as the poet did not see the Yarrow, he had invested the river with romantic halo. On seeing the river he received a rude shock, for all the romance conjured up by imagination, melted into air, into thin air. The real always falls short of the imaginary. In Lamb's time the stage-conditions were highly defective, and the illusion could not be so easily created.

Lamb's reluctance to see a play on the stage has other implications. He stressed the importance of poetry. Readers should feast upon the magic of poetry, and that is the end of a drama. It is strange that the Elizabethan age and the nineteenth century are both called Romantic periods. But in the earlier Romantic period all people enjoyed the stage representation, while in the later period reading was preferred to acting.

Lamb is definitely of the opinion that the passions and emotions of the characters defy stage-representation. Actors and actresses with their mimetic skill fail to represent the passions. The characters do certain things and say certain things, but what is working within their minds cannot be laid bare. Whenever

left to himself Hamlet is in meditation, and sometimes he has communions with his soul. This, an actor, can never hope to represent. The passion of grief and anger of Othello also cannot be acted. An actor will fail most in *King Lear*. "The Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted." "So to see Lear acted,—to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted. The contemptible machinery by which they mimic the storm which he goes out in, is not more inadequate to represent the horrors of the real elements, than any actor can be to represent Lear: they might more easily propose to personate the Satan of Milton upon a stage, or one of Michael Angelo's terrible figures. The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimensions, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too insignificant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear,—we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms; in the aberrations of his reason, we discover a mighty irregular power of reasoning, immethodized from the ordinary purposes of life, but exerting its powers, as the wind blows where it listeth, at will upon the corruptions and abuses of mankind." The old King has been turned out by his ungrateful daughters on a stormy night. That is all the producer, director and actor can represent. But the storm of the soul of King Lear cannot be represented. Bradley merely echoed Lamb when he also asserted that *Lear* could not be acted. But Lamb perhaps did not know the historic fact that the crowning ambition of the greatest actors of all ages had been to play the part of King Lear, and that it was in Lear's part that some of the greatest actors scored spectacular triumph. Burbage of the Elizabethan age, Betterton of the Restoration period and Macready and Henry Irving of the Victorian period rendered very good accounts of themselves while playing the part of King Lear. The effective acting of *King Lear* is difficult, but



not impossible. The spiritualities of the play have to be released in performance. The stage must be designed in such a way as to allow rapid continuity of action ; and as James Agate has put it, the part of Lear is played by a great actor who is the kind of great actor who can play Lear.

Granville Barker has challenged the view of Lamb and conclusively proved that *Lear* can be acted. "Lamb's was the age of spectacle," Barker said, "he bases his arguments upon it, not upon Shakespeare's... It was the age of 'the beauties of Shakespeare.' That, its beauty beside, this dynamic verse and prose held secrets of stagecraft does not seem to have been considered." Again he says : "Lamb rests his condemnation of the play's acting upon the third act and the scenes in the storm... Lamb states the case, let us admit, about as simply and well as it can be stated, and he fixes upon the supreme moments of dramatic achievement and theatrical difficulty. If we meet the challenge here and make good answer, may not the rest of the play claim a verdict too ? Well, Lamb's case, as I suggest, is a bad case because it shows no recognition at all of Elizabethan stage-craft ; his case, in fact, is not against Shakespeare the playwright, but against his betrayal... Lear, Kent and the rest must *act* the storm then ; there is no other way. They must not lose themselves in its description ; it will not do for us to be interested in the storm at the expense of our interest in them, the loss there would be more than the gain. For the effect of the storm upon Lear is Shakespeare's true objective. So he has to give it magnitude without detracting for one precious moment during the crisis from Lear's own dramatic supremacy. And he solves his problem by making the actor impersonate Lear and the storm together, by identifying Lear's passion with the storm's... This is the basis of his stage-craft, to make Lear and the storm as one. And if Lamb saw an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick he did not see the Lear of Shakespeare's intention."

Granville Barker regretted that Lamb had no idea about the Elizabethan stage-conditions. And we regret that Granville Barker did not appreciate the point of view of the Romantic critics who set so much store by imagination that should not be confined by the scenic art.

William Hazlitt once said publicly that Coleridge was "the only person from whom I ever learnt anything." But as critics their approaches and methods seem to be fundamentally different.

Coleridge was a theorist, Hazlitt an impressionist. Coleridge was a philosopher, and the German critics and philosophers coloured his vision. Hazlitt owed nothing to the German and very little to the continental critics. He was singing his native woodnotes with the first fine careless rapture. Coleridge always maintained some aloofness from his audience. Hazlitt was courting the public with his journalistic flair. Always a revolutionary firebrand, Hazlitt regretted and condemned the political apostasy of Coleridge and Wordsworth. The hero-worshipping attitude in his "First acquaintance with the poets,"—the poets being Coleridge and Wordsworth, faded away, and Hazlitt became critical of his erstwhile heroes. It is not merely their political difference. They differed in their attitude to life and sense of values.

Silence sometimes is frightfully eloquent and damaging. In his *On the Characters of Shakespeare's plays*, the first book of the Romantic criticism of Shakespeare in England, Hazlitt made no reference, however cursory and casual, to Coleridge. The omission is all the more glaring, because of his glowing tributes to A. W. Schlegel. It should, however, be remembered that Hazlitt in course of his lectures made some remarks not upon Coleridge but only on his views on Shakespeare. And the remarks, it is superfluous to point out, were disparaging.

Hazlitt's personality is writ large in his criticism. In this respect Montaigne is his master. He was unconsciously a follower of Swift, because of his rancour and bitterness of feelings. He hated with intensity. In this respect he was Lamb's antithesis, who loved passionately and laughed, even when his soul was wrung in agony. The mantle of Rousseau also fell upon him. Like Rousseau he was equally susceptible to emotions, sentiments and ideas. In his cynicism he was, though not consciously, akin to La Rochefoucauld. Like Lamb he had the sheer power of enjoyment, but he had not the Lambian wit or humour. In spite of his political differences Hazlitt covertly and overtly paid his tributes to Wordsworth, the reason being that both of them pinned their faith in the empirical tradition of England.

The personal approach of Hazlitt is in contradistinction to the philosophical approach of Coleridge. While recording his impressions on Shakespeare, and for that matter, any other writer, Hazlitt completely forgot that he was addressing a large public with varying tastes and feelings. He was all the while thinking that he was speaking to his friends, who might at times disagree,

and yet give him a patient and sympathetic hearing. One is never conceited or pedantic in one's communication to one's friends, and Hazlitt was never conceited or pedantic. His criticism, in his own words, is free from "pedantic rules and pragmatical formulas." Hazlitt had an abundance of gusto, and this gusto gushed forth in all his critical writings and essays.

Unlike most of the eighteenth century critics of Shakespeare, Hazlitt never cared for the formal rules and the classical models. In the Romantic age, the classical masters were completely thrown off their pedestal. Shakespeare's characters are what most interested Hazlitt and his fellow-romantics. While undertaking his work *The Characters of Shakespeare's plays*, Hazlitt thought that he was discharging a national duty. For he was piqued "that it should be reserved for a foreign critic [ Schlegel ] to give reasons for the faith which we English have in Shakespeare." Whately, Morgann and Richardson are pioneers in the field of characterisation, but Hazlitt broke new grounds altogether. It is difficult to agree with Rene Wellek, otherwise an astute critic and able historian, when he says that this is a "comparatively immature work." Like Minerva with full panoply Hazlitt appeared on the scene and with passionate gusto and joyous abandon, communicated his impressions about Shakespeare's rich and varied gallery of portraits. In the words of Halliday, "it is something new in the criticism of Shakespeare, not a judicial balancing of virtues against defects, not Shakespeare at a distance but Shakespeare at close quarters, an intimate revelation of the beauties of the plays." Halliday quotes Francis Jeffrey: "The book is written less to tell the reader what Mr. H. knows about Shakespeare or his writings, than to explain to him what he *feels* about them—and *why* he feels so—and thinks that all who profess to love poetry should feel so likewise... When we have said that his observations are generally right, we have said, in substance, that they are not generally original."

Hazlitt saw everything through the medium of passion. His remark that the heroines of Shakespeare's plays live only for their attachment to others is an excellent piece of criticism. He made a convincing analysis of Shakespeare's method of characterisation. Shakespeare, he maintained, uses contrasts and analogy to draw his characters. The contrast is striking in *Macbeth*. In *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare exhibits his profound knowledge of the human mind. *Othello* is a wonderful study of passions. Here

also there is a remarkable contrast. Love, anger, jealousy and hatred fill Othello's mind in turn. He is strong and he is weak. Desdemona is courageous and timid. In *Timon of Athens* love has been transformed into hatred. In *Coriolanus* the contrast is between the strength, courage and aristocracy of Coriolanus and the lackadaisical character of the Roman people. In *Troilus and Cressida* the ludicrous and the ironical elements have been contrasted with the stately elements.

In *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare completely identifies himself with the characters. Hamlet's suffering is the suffering of humanity. Hamlet is a philosopher, and he, therefore, does not know how to take revenge. Refined ideas and a crude murder do not go hand in hand. In all his plays, and particularly in the *Tempest*, Shakespeare's universal genius is clearly manifest. Like colossus he has planted one foot in reality and one in imagination. In *Romeo and Juliet* we feel the healthy pulse of the lover's passions. *King Lear* is the greatest Shakespearian play as it is the record of the deepest passions.

In his *Lectures on the English Poets*, Hazlitt compared four writers—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. Chaucer is a poet of manners; Spenser is a poet of romance; Shakespeare is a poet of nature in the largest sense of the term; and Milton is the poet of morality. Chaucer describes things as they are; Spenser as we wish them to be; Shakespeare as they would be; Milton as they ought to be. Imagination was common to all four. The characteristic of Chaucer is his intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation, but of Shakespeare, everything. "The great distinction of Shakespeare's genius," said Hazlitt, "was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age." "The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind," continued Hazlitt, "was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egoist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself, but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought."



Hazlitt recognised so much of beauty in the plays of Shakespeare. He found so much poetry in the plays. But in the poems he found no poetry. That is why *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* were no better than a "couple of ice-boxes" to him. He also regretted that "in expressing the thoughts of others, Shakespeare was inspired ; in expressing his own, [ in his sonnets] he was a mechanic." Hazlitt's comments on the *Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* are perhaps substantially correct. For there the passions are demonstrably artificial. But in the sonnets where Shakespeare unlocked his heart we hear the heart-beats of the poet. While reading the sonnets we do not touch the paper and the print, we touch a man, throbbing with passion and emotion. It is only a paradox that Hazlitt, himself full of passionate intensity, found no warmth of passion in the sonnets.

Thomas De Quincey like Lamb wrote little about Shakespeare, but it is all the more valuable for its paucity. He is chiefly known as the writer of impassioned prose. It is unfortunate that critics of literature remember his *Confessions of an English opium-eater*, *suspiria de Profundis*, *Autobiography*, and *The Revolt of the Tartars and English Mail coach*, but his inimitable essay *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* is often forgotten.

Ever since he was a boy the murder of Duncan had been haunting De Quincey's mind. It is difficult to sympathise with Macbeth, yet we feel drawn to him. Macbeth has a storm raging in his soul. His mind for the time being has become a veritable hell. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth have banished from their heart all their humanity, love and remorse. The divine in man has been withdrawn at the onslaught of the devilish forces. It appears as if normal life is arrested. Time is annihilated. Suddenly there was the knocking at the gate of Macbeth's castle. Life that was extinct was revived. De Quincey recorded a personal experience, which was described with a rare insight.

For this fine but short piece of criticism De Quincey compares favourably with Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt. It is a record of deeply personal response to a Shakespearean scene, charged with mystery and tension. But the personal response does not remain personal. It becomes a piece of sound criticism. His wonderful peroration which is a warm tribute to the poet deserves to be quoted :

'O mighty poet ! thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art ; but are also like the

phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers ; like frost and snow, rain and dew, hailstorm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the farther we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident !

Besides his *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*, De Quincey contributed an article on Shakespeare to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. De Quincey did not believe that Shakespeare was thrown into cold neglect in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Addison could not reach the empyrean heights of Shakespeare's poetry, and Milton was too puritanic to appreciate Shakespeare. "Shakespeare has extended the domains of human consciousness and pushed its dark frontiers into regions never even suspected." The female characters that Shakespeare has drawn are the acme of perfection. In fact, we cannot even dream of the ineffable charm and beauty of Desdemona, Imogen, Ophelia, Miranda, Hermione and Perdita. The female characters of the ancient Greek dramas were all abstract figures. We respect them, but they cannot compel our love. The heroines of the Greek dramas were unsexed, but Shakespeare's women are essentially feminine and have all the grace and tenderness of eternal womanhood. The difference can well be accounted for. The Greeks believed in inexorable fate, and Shakespeare wrote his plays in obedience to Christian morality. Shakespeare excelled in depicting male characters as well.

This essay is not as well remembered as the "knocking at the Gate." Its importance lies in the fact that Shakespeare's women are here brought to the fore for the first time. Mrs. Jameson's *Shakespeare's Heroines* appeared in 1832, while De Quincey's essay was published in 1838. Yet we should call De Quincey the forerunner, for his essay has the freshness of the April morning, and Mrs. Jameson's book smacks of the sentimentalities of the Victorian age.

Another importance of the essay is its inimitable impassioned prose. Here, of course, he did not reach the cloud cuckooland of his *Dream Fugue*. But, nevertheless, he claimed here as well the infallibility in deciding upon the precise use of words. Form and content cannot be separated, far less in the writings of De

Quincey. The skilfully modulated inflexions of his voice remind one of the light footsteps of the angels of enchanted paradise. He has here as in the essay on *Macbeth* attempted to do in prose what poets do in poetry. He does not always care for the harmonious arrangement of form and colour. There is just a long procession of gorgeous draperies and imposing figures, but the meaning is of secondary importance.

Francis Jeffrey was a journalist and reviewer of books. But the periodical criticism of the early years of the nineteenth century should not be summarily dismissed. Periodical criticism was sometimes ill-assorted, and was a strange medley of good and bad. Saintsbury was right when he said: "you have to guard against prejudices innumerable, subtle, hydraheaded,—prejudices personal and political, prejudices social and religious, prejudices of style and temperament, prejudices arising from school, University, country almost every conceivable predicament of man."

Francis Jeffrey of *The Edinburgh Review* was a power to reckon with. His pontifical remark on Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "This will never do," has often been regarded as something damning and dooming. But on an analysis of his entire critical corpus it will appear that he was essentially romantic. He was never tired of his crusade against neo-classicism. His well-known remark on the Elizabethan age as "by far the brightest in the history of English literature,—or indeed of human intellect and capacity," should be recalled before we call him a destructive critic. It was he who defended Shakespeare against Madame de Stael's animadversions. He loved some of the romantic writers only because they followed in the footsteps of the Elizabethan masters. It is not true that he disparaged all the romantic poets. He had a soft corner in his heart for both Byron and Keats. His antagonism to Wordsworth and Coleridge is due purely to political considerations. The Tory could not stand the liberals.

Jeffrey wrote some articles on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan age in the columns of the *Edinburgh Review*, some of which later appeared under the title, *Contributions to the Edinburgh Review*. Of them the most important is his review of Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*. We have already quoted a portion of this essay in our estimate of Hazlitt. His warm appreciation of Hazlitt's work is eventually his appreciation of Shakespeare from the point

of view of a romantic. He was unstinted in his praise, for he discerned in it the "fine sense of beauties of the author, and an eloquent exposition of them". It is a thousand pities that all the authors we know of remained unaccountably silent over this brilliant exposition of Hazlitt's work. Jeffrey used a very happy expression when he said about Hazlitt, "He seems...in a state of happy intoxication".

Jeffrey's appreciation of Hazlitt emanated from his appreciation of Shakespeare. All the excellences of Shakespeare, Jeffrey said, were like those of Nature herself. "His flowers are not tied up in garlands nor his fruits crushed, into baskets—but spring living from the soil, in all the dew and freshness of youth; with the graceful foliage in which they lurk, and the ample branches, the rough and vigorous stem, and the widespreading roots on which they depend, are present along with them, and share, in their places, the equal care of their creator." So many critics, the neo-classicists not excepted, spoke of Shakespeare in relation to nature. But we wonder, how many of them could give such a graphic description of the freshness of nature that Shakespeare sought to depict. Jeffrey found all the charm of a moonlit landscape and the visible appearances of the infant light in Shakespeare's plays, all described with magical grace. In Shakespeare there is a happy blending of sweet sounds and fragrant odours. The speeches of many of the characters are so sweet as to border on music. Caliban is grossness incarnate and is yet an aesthete, who touched with supernatural harmonies, makes a supremely poetical speech. The splendour of natural imagery is to be detected in all the plays of Shakespeare. Jeffrey while speaking about Hazlitt's work, deviated from the theme, and rhapsodised over Shakespeare in a way that only a romantic could.

John Keats wrote less about Shakespeare than even Lamb and De Quincey. Wordsworth, Southey and Shelley wrote nothing, which could pose a problem for Shakespearian criticism. Keats and Shakespeare had an intellectual affinity, and Middleton Murry in his *Keats and Shakespeare* has pointed out the similarities :

"Let me say then that my purpose has been to vindicate more completely than it has been vindicated before Matthew Arnold's sentence concerning Keats, that I have been trying to show that it was inevitable that Keats should be 'with Shakespeare'." Keats' marginalia in his personal copy of Shakespeare shows his passionate attachment to the Elizabethan master. He, however, did not



live long enough to write at length about him. We have it on record that Keats attended some of the Lectures on Shakespeare by Hazlitt. Hazlitt, Lamb, Keats and Leigh Hunt were friendly to one another, and Lockhart spitefully called them members of the Cockney school. Kean's acting of Shakespeare's plays was Keats' passion. Keats always regarded Shakespeare as his model, and he was never tired of emulating Shakespeare's "negative capability", which he thought to be the salient characteristic of Shakespeare as an artist. In one of his letters he wrote :

"It struck me what quality went to form a man of achievement especially in literature—I mean *negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason". According to Keats the necessary precondition of poetry is to accept things as they are. Poetry must not intellectualise things, nor should it indoctrinate people. Shakespeare and Keats are pure poets, as they had "negative capability". On another occasion Keats said that poetry must not have palpable designs upon us. He asked Shelley to curb his magnanimity and load every rift of his subject with ore. Wordsworth and Shelley, he feared, had no "negative capability", and hence they relatively failed as artists.

## *Victorian Criticism*

Victorian literature is at once a continuation of and departure from Romantic literature. In certain respects Victorian criticism may be called the second phase of Romantic criticism. It is rather strange that in poetry and novels the Victorians occasionally broke with the tradition of the Romantics, but in criticism they did not. Victorian criticism was more or less an imitation of Romantic criticism but only a little more sentimental, and, therefore, artificial. In poetry the Victorians like the Romantics believed in the sovereignty of feeling and imagination. With the exceptions of Arnold and Hopkins Victorian poets in general still prized the heart over the head. In poetry and novels there was an intense awareness of the contemporary problems. The age was in ferment. Along with a sense of self-complacency, a note of despair could also be distinctly heard. The conflict between science and religion, reason and devoutness, faith and scepticism was writ large on the literature of the age. The literature was profoundly affected by the tendencies and movements of the Victorian age. The note of materialism and utilitarianism could be heard everywhere.

The social ferment, so much in evidence in different branches of literature, was conspicuous by its absence in Shakespearian criticism. The critics, of course, were caught in the vortex of social upheavals. Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold were unsparing in their criticism of the society. Carlyle in most of his works appeared as the sworn enemy of materialism and utilitarianism. His approach to life and things was moral and religious. In his view, history is the biography of the greatest men. And Shakespeare, one of his heroes, was not only a poet but also a prophet. A strong didactic element characterises the works of most of the Victorian critics. In Shakespearian criticism also there is a preponderance of this element.

Apparently Ruskin's standpoint was aesthetic, as Carlyle's was religious. To him the sense of beauty was of supreme importance. Yet his sense of beauty was animated by a strong moral sense. To him, Turner was a great artist only because he symbolised

contemplation and moral nature. In his defence of the Gothic architecture he sacrificed the materialistic to spiritual aims. Gothic architecture was glorified at the expense of Renaissance architecture. For the Gothic art is the symbol of faith and virtue. In the last analysis Ruskin's sense of beauty is a sense of discipline. The moral and the aesthetic elements are identified.

Arnold's standpoint was that of culture. He was a critic of society. He found anarchy everywhere, and culture was his recipe. He was also a strict moralist. Ruskin was a romantic, while Arnold was a classicist. Yet their approach is illuminated by moral ideas. Poetry or drama which recoils from morality also recoils from life. Even Walter Pater, the great exponent of the theory of art for art's sake could not avoid the moral strain. He himself distinguished between good art and great art. T. S. Eliot did not exaggerate when he said that basically there was no difference between Arnold's moral idea and Pater's aesthetic idea. Pater was never tired of emphasising the importance of a noble subject. In his essay on *Measure for Measure* and 'Shakespeare's Kings' he did speak of moral ideas. But Arnold spoke overtly while Pater spoke covertly. Dowden in his *Shakespeare—his Mind and Art* is essentially romantic, but the didacticism is quite prominent. He, in fact, traced the moral development in Shakespeare. His classification of Shakespeare's plays and nomenclature—"On the heights", and "In the Depths", etc. are self-explanatory. Swinburne was perhaps the only Victorian who escaped the moral strain. A pre-Raphaelite that Swinburne was, he was out and out romantic without any moral strain.

Victorian criticism is mostly impressionistic. Verbal criticism or the problem of emendation was confined to the eighteenth century editors; in the nineteenth century, criticism became impressionistic and exclamatory. Victorian criticism maintained the tradition of Romantic criticism. It was not as distinguished as the eighteenth century criticism in respect of scholarship. The distinctive feature of the Victorian criticism is not its romantic attitude to Shakespeare. The early nineteenth century and Victorian critics are equally romantic. They both threw away the classical yardsticks. Imagination and not rule became the accepted criterion. But the Victorian critics became more idolatrous. Shakespeareolatry was thick in the air, as Shakespeareology was in the eighteenth century. True, Coleridge said that criticism would be genial only when it was

reverential. The Victorian critics of Shakespeare were more than reverential. They almost suspended their judgment and critical conscience in their exuberance of feelings. The Romantic critics like Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb and De Quincey were, no doubt, guided by emotion, but they had enough of intellect to see things in their correct perspective. The Victorian critics like Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold and Pater towered head and shoulders above their contemporaries. Arnold and Pater were greater critics than most of their predecessors. But Arnold and Pater were not the only Shakespearian critics of the age. Social criticism was far more important than literary criticism. And Shakespearian criticism is but a part and a very small part, of literary criticism. The women-critics particularly were maudlin and sentimental. A pioneer as an interpreter of Shakespeare's women, Mrs. Jameson is at times sickeningly sentimental. Helma Faucit, popularly known as Lady Martin was an actress of considerable distinction. But as a critic she was a mere echo of Mrs. Jameson. Her *On some Shakespeare's Female characters* commanded the admiration of the Victorian readers, but is ridiculed today for its sentimental effusions. Charles Cowden Clarke and his wife Mary Clarke were no less sentimental. They had enthusiasm, but no scholarship; they had emotion, but not enough of critical acumen. Sisson is therefore right when he observed that "the nineteenth century is perhaps lacking in Shakespeare critics of outstanding quality."

Some critics and scholars of the Victorian period were neither interpretative nor aesthetic. They did not believe in bardolatry. If to the romantics, Shakespeare was a religion, an article of faith, to the scholars of the Victorian age, Shakespeare was an object of scientific investigation. Seriousness was a strong point with the Victorians. And with profound seriousness some scholars started the first Shakespeare society in 1840. J. P. Collier, the founder of the Society, began well and concluded his career in utter disgrace and humiliation. Without being a scholar he had scholarly pretensions. Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt were all dead. De Quincey survived, but he did nothing great or even mentionable after 1834. And therefore when Collier in collaboration with Halliwell-Phillipps and others started the Shakespeare society for a steady and organised advance in Shakespearian scholarship, he was loudly acclaimed everywhere. In his *History of English Dramatic Poetry and Annals of the Stage*



Collier made a startling discovery, and threw some light on the Chamberlain's company. The inhabitants of Black friars appealed to the Privy Council not to build a private theatre in their locality. Collier unearthed the counter-petition of the actors of the Chamberlain's Company, and had thus earned a secure niche in the temple of learning. He had an access to the Earl of Ellesmere's Library, where he unearthed many other valuable documents. Indefatigable in his researches Collier incorporated the fruits of his toil in the *Diary of Philip Henslowe and Memoirs of the Principal Actors in the Plays of Shakespeare*. He once chanced upon a second Folio of Shakespeare, containing several emendations of the text. In 1853 Collier published his "*Notes and Emendations to the text of Shakespeare's plays, from early manuscript corrections in a copy of the Folio, 1632, in the possession of J. Payne Collier, Esq., F.S.A.*" forming a supplemental volume to the works of Shakespeare by the same editor, in eight volumes, Octavo. Printed for the Shakespeare Society." Collier claimed that the notes were by Perkins, a scholar of the seventeenth century. Halliwell-Phillipps in his *Curiosities of Modern Shakespearian criticism* challenged the authenticity of the notes and called them forgeries. S. W. Singer in his *The Text of Shakespeare Vindicated* pursued the matter. The whole thing was subjected to a close scrutiny, and Nicholas Hamilton of the British Museum wrote :

"On a close examination of the margins they are found to be covered with an infinite number of faint pencil marks and corrections, in obedience to which the supposed old corrector has made his emendations."

The emendations, Hamilton concluded, were by a nineteenth-century scholar, which amounts to saying that they were done by Collier. Mutual recriminations continued for several years. He was never directly called a forger, but the insinuation was there, and the result was that the Shakespeare society ended in a fiasco.

On the ashes of the first Shakespeare society, the second Shakespeare society was born like a phoenix, F. J. Furnivall and J. O. Halliwell-Phillipps being the sponsors of the organisation. Furnivall stated the objectives of the Shakespeare society as follows :

"Antiquarian illustration, emendation, and verbal criticism—to say nothing of forgery, or at least, publication of forg'd

documents—were of the first school. The subject of the growth, the oneness of Shakespeare, the links between his successive plays, the light thrown on each by comparison with its neighbour, the distinctive characteristics of each period and its contrast with the others, the treatment of the same or like incidents etc. in the different periods of Shakespeare's life—this subject, in all its branches, is the special business of the present, the second school of Victorian students.”

Furnivall's scholarship is beyond dispute. A man with varied tastes he was the founder of the Shelley, Browning and Chaucer Societies. His preface to the English translation of Gervinus' *Commentaries* is an eloquent testimony to his scholarship. His supervision of the production of the facsimiles of the Quartos of Shakespeare's plays also bears out his profound learning. Halliwell-Phillipps is remembered for his *Life of Shakespeare* and the fifteen-volume edition of Shakespeare. Furnivall and Halliwell-Phillipps were strongly in favour of studying Shakespeare as a whole. Malone wanted to ascertain the order in which Shakespeare's plays were written. His incomplete task devolved upon these two Victorians, and they rendered a very good account of themselves. They subjected the plays of Shakespeare to verse-tests, and convincingly established the chronological order. Coleridge with all his knowledge of German philosophy had not the scholarship, expected of an editor. Otherwise he would not have glibly suggested that the *The Winter's Tale* was one of the earliest plays of Shakespeare.

Under the joint editorship of W. G. Clark, W. A. Wright and J. Glover was published the Cambridge Shakespeare, which was a monument of scholarship and remained the standard text of Shakespeare's plays for years. The Globe edition of Shakespeare was also the standard text. And hence it is true to say that the legacy of the eighteenth century scholarship was in a large measure transmitted to the Victorians.

Another aspect of Victorian criticism is its philosophical bias. Gervinus and Ulrici, the illustrious critics of Germany studied Shakespeare philosophically, i.e., they assessed Shakespeare as a dramatist with reference to certain attitudes to life. They are not carbon copies of one another. Rümelin was not as philosophical as Gervinus and Ulrici. He was, in fact, a bit critical in his approach. In his *Shakespeare studied by a Realist*, he recorded his protest against fulsome adoration.

These German critics left their impress upon the Victorian critics of England. Dowden, for example, was philosophical, while Moulton was searching and penetrating, if not critical. There were also critics whose works are a synthesis of the philosophical and critical elements.

Walter Savage Landor, born in the romantic age died in the Victorian period. With the exception of Matthew Arnold he was undoubtedly the most classical writer of the nineteenth century. A fine classical scholar, Landor was essentially classical in his temperament. He had his shortcomings as a critic, but his *Imaginary conversations* contains some fine critical observations. The conversation between Landor and Southey has no classical severity, but only romantic exuberance. Landor paid his homage to Shakespeare only in a way a romantic critic does. A few extracts from his *Imaginary Conversations*, disconnected as they are, may be quoted.

"In so wide and untrodden a creation as that of Shakespeare, can we wonder or complain that sometimes we are bewildered and entangled in the exuberance of fertility?"

Yes, we are bewildered because of his immensity. But common readers that we are, we can only admire the greatness of Shakespeare.

"He lighted with his golden lamp on high  
The unknown regions of the human heart,  
Show'd its bright fountains, show'd its rueful wastes,  
Its shoals and headlands, and a tower he rais'd  
Refulgent, where eternal breakers roll,  
For all to see, but no man to approach."

Shakespeare is a great chronicler of life. "Human life is exhibited not only in its calamities and its cares, but in the gay unguarded hours of ebullient and confident prosperity."

Shakespeare, whom Landor preferred to every other poet, thought that he contained "more poetry and more wisdom than all the rest united". His famous remark on Milton and Shakespeare deserves to be quoted: "A rib of Shakespeare would have made a Milton: the same portion of Milton, all poets born ever since." Landor's comparative study of Shakespeare and Bacon may be quoted.

"There is as great a difference between Shakespeare and Bacon as between an American forest and a London timber-yard. In the

timber-yard the materials are sawed and squared and set across : in the forest we have the natural form of the tree, all its growth, all its branches, all its leaves, all the mosses that grow about it, all the birds and insects that inhabit it ; now deep shadows absorbing the whole wilderness ; now bright bursting glades, with exuberant grass and flowers and fruitage ; now untroubled skies ; now terrific thunderstorms, everywhere multiformity, everywhere immensity."

It is a wonder how the classical Landor possessed all the qualities of romantic criticism. His criticism is what Croce calls exclamatory criticism. He is conveying his ecstasy while reading and discovering Shakespeare. The attitude is one of fulsome adoration and blind worship. Swinburne, himself an exclamatory critic and a warm admirer of Landor was effusive in his tributes to Landor as a Shakespearian critic :

"The time is wellnigh come now for me to consecrate in this book my good will if not good work to the threefold and thrice happy memory of the three who have written of Shakespeare as never man wrote, nor ever man may write again ; to the everlasting praise and honour and glory of Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Walter Savage Landor."

Every Victorian critic, however, could not be blind to the "faults" of Shakespeare like Landor. Thomas Bowdler had enough of Victorian prudery, and he thought it worth while to publish his *Family Shakespeare*, where all the indecencies and obscurities of Shakespeare could be expunged. For in his plays there were many things which were "unfit to be read aloud by a gentleman to a company of Ladies." With the zeal of a reformer, and in the early nineteenth century there was many a reformer, Bowdler began to "bowdlerise" Shakespeare. He must mercilessly prune what might raise a blush on the cheeks of the Victorian ladies. Apologetically he said that he was deleting passages from Shakespeare, but he was adding none. The plays that were thus eviscerated were *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*.

Thomas Carlyle, one of the greatest literary figures of the age is a typical Victorian critic of Shakespeare. So very severe in his criticism of the age and society, he was exclamatory in his criticism of Shakespeare. He regarded history as the biography of great men. The moving force in History is also the great men. He was thus a hero-worshipper, and his vision was coloured



by the O ! altitudo sentimentalities. He had, therefore, idealised Shakespeare in his *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History*.

Carlyle was not at all in sympathy with the neo-classical critics. Theoretically at least he believed that criticism should not be either pure panegyric or bare censure. "No man," he said, "can pronounce dogmatically, with even a chance of being right, on the faults of a poem, till he has seen its very best and highest beauty—the beauty of the poem as a whole in the strict sense ; the clear view of it as an indivisible unity." Carlyle's conception of literary criticism and that of history are almost identical. In *Heroes and Hero-worship* he asserted that the history of the world is the history of great men. "There is no biography of a man," he said, "much less any history, or biography of a nation, but wraps in it a message out of heaven." "Biography," he said again, "is by nature the most universally profitable universally pleasant of all things ; especially biography of distinguished individuals." "Great men are the inspired ( speaking and acting ) texts of that divine Book of Revelations, whereof a chapter is completed from epoch to epoch and by some named History." Carlyle's literary criticism is essentially biographical. "There is no heroic poem in the world but is at the bottom a biography." According to Carlyle, sympathy and reverence are the *sine qua non* of a good critic. "Criticism," he declared, "stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired, between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning but understand not their deep import."

So surprisingly catholic in his views, Carlyle could not practise the same catholicity in his criticism of Lamb, Coleridge and Scott. In his criticism of Shakespeare, however, he had been generous to a fault. We can quote a few extracts to illustrate our point :

"That Shakespeare is the chief of all poets hitherto ; the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world, has left record of himself in the way of Literature. On the whole, I know not such a power of vision, such a faculty of thought, if we take all the characters of it, in any other man. Such a calmness of depth ; placid joyous strength all things imaged in that great soul of his so true and clear as in a tranquil unfathomable sea ! ... Yet I call Shakespeare greater than Dante in that he fought

truly, and did conquer ... Whoever looks intelligently at this Shakespeare may recognise that he too was a *prophet*, in his way ; of an insight analogous to the prophetic, though he took it up in another strain ... For our honour among foreign nations, as an ornament to our English household, what item is there that we would not surrender rather than him ? Consider now, if they asked us, will you give up your Indian empire or your Shakespeare, you English ; never have had any Indian empire or never have had any Shakespeare ? Really it were a grave question. Official persons would answer doubtless in official language ; but we for our part too, should not be forced to answer : Indian empire, or no Indian empire ; we cannot do without Shakespeare ! Indian empire will go, at any rate, some day ; but this Shakespeare does not go, he lasts for ever with us. We cannot give up our Shakespeare !”

Carlyle, so very bitter in his denunciations of many of the accepted values, seems to have made penance for all his sins of omission and commission by paying to the Elizabethan the warmest tribute that is humanly possible. His work is a prose hymn to Shakespeare. But tribute is not criticism. Carlyle is sentimental ; he is effusive, but he can never be called a major Shakespearian critic.

William Spalding is remembered for his *Letter on Shakespeare's Authorship of the Two Noble Kinsmen ; and on the Characteristics of Shakespeare's Style*. In a sense Spalding was the first man to make a methodical study of the verse of Shakespeare's plays. No less a person than Furnivall called his work one of the ablest pieces of Shakespearian criticism. Spalding tried to separate the contributions of Shakespeare and Fletcher in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. He found Shakespeare's verse to be grand, solemn, stately and passionate, while Fletcher's verse was mellifluous. Shakespeare's words and expressions and turns of phrase had the inimitable stamp of the master. Shakespeare's similes were more telling than Fletcher's metaphors. Fletcher's fund of thought was small, while Shakespeare had a wide mental vision. Spalding was not a blind hero-worshipper like Carlyle. But he did recognise Shakespeare's knowledge of the fundamentals of human nature and the elemental force of his mind.

Henry Hallam in his *Introduction to Literature of Europe in the 15th, 16th and 17th Centuries* discussed the plays of Shakespeare at length. Hallam had no hesitation in declaring that Shakespeare

could easily eclipse Greene and Marlowe. The effortless skill of Shakespeare's poetry also compelled his admiration. In his second phase Shakespeare painted certain characters that show deeper insight. His characters are all individualised, and he has outshone all his contemporaries in creative power.

Matthew Arnold, one of the finest critics of all ages, was a classicist, and his views on Shakespeare are, therefore, as worthy of special consideration as those of Ben Jonson and T. S. Eliot. His preface to the 1853 volume of *poems* proved to be the nucleus of a seminal concept of poetry, the later criticism being essentially the application and amplification of this idea. The preface is an important utterance at a critical moment of English literary history, and a distinct contribution to Victorian poetics. Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* voiced the sentiments of at least a section of the Romantic poets, weary and impatient of the garden-bred elegance of the Augustans. In much the same way the *Preface* to the 1853 Volume is the manifesto of classicism in an age of subjectivism and individualism in poetry. In a letter Arnold wrote :

"At Oxford particularly many complain that the subjects treated [ In the strayed Revellers and other poems ] do not interest them. But as I feel rather as a reformer in poetical matters, I am glad of this opposition. If I have health and opportunity to go on, I will shake the present methods until they go down, see if I don't. More and more I bent against the modern English habit ( too much encouraged by Wordsworth ) of using poetry as a channel for thinking aloud, instead of making anything." A reformer that Arnold was, he had nothing but contempt for "those d-d Elizabethan poets". Of the nineteenth century Romantics, Keats and Shelley were specially frowned upon. Arthur Hugh Clough was a "brute" for having asked Arnold to read Keats' letters. For there was no limit to the "harm he has done in English poetry". He was a mere "Style and form seeker". Keats and Shelley had exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity of the Elizabethan poets. True poetry, Arnold was convinced, does not consist in exuberance of expression, not in richness of images, so much emphasised and practised by the Romantic poets of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Poetry does not consist in exquisite bits and images. It should, on the contrary, have architectonice. The Elizabethan Romantics and Keats and Shelley were not the

only persons to be hit. The spasmodists like Alexander Smith, Dobell and Bailey also came in for bitter criticism. The mid-Victorian reviews had all joined in the general chorus of unqualified panegyrics about them. These Spasmodists were inflamed by borrowed passions and neglected overall theme and action to magnify isolated emotions.

True, Arnold wrote his famous sonnet on Shakespeare in 1849 and paid his warmest tributes to the Elizabethan Titan :—

Others abide our questions. Thou art free.

We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,

Out-topping knowledge.

But Arnold in his criticism refused to let Shakespeare go scot-free. In this respect he compares favourably with Ben Jonson who said that Shakespeare wanted art, and in the poem prefixed to the first folio edition said that he was the "soul of the age, the applause, delight the wonder of our stage". This apparent contradiction is noticed in Arnold's case as well. As a poet he could not but pay his homage to the greater poet. Shakespeare, he fully realised, defied all analysis and the chains of rules. But as a reformer and critic he must subject even Shakespeare to a close scrutiny. In the stronghold of romanticism Arnold was blaring forth the trumpet of the glory of the Aristotelian canons of criticism. He reacted against any kind of exaggerated lyric poetry and also the post-romantic demand for modernity. He also drew a distinction between poetical sense and rhetorical sense. He insisted on total impression, objectivity and impersonality. He advocated a rigorous cutting down of inessentials and superfluities, and suggested that the variety should be brought into a totality.

The reviewers of the 1853 preface raised their objections on the following grounds, *viz.* his over-emphasis on 'action', exclusion of subjective or lyrical poetry, strictures on Shakespeare, championing the past, the formulation of a poetic theory, unjust comparison of four great classical works with not so very great works of modern authors, undervaluation of expression and purple patches, stress on the supreme importance of "subjects", over-praise of the Greek classics and inability to appreciate the beauty of the Teutonic thought and tradition. Many of the reviewers carped at Arnold's strictures on Shakespeare. And it is worthwhile knowing what those strictures are :

"Foremost among these models for the English writer stands Shakespeare : a name the greatest perhaps of all poetical names ;



a name never to be mentioned without reverence. I will venture, however, to express a doubt, whether the influence of his works, excellent and fruitful for the readers of poetry, for the great majority, has been of unmixed advantage to the writers of it. Shakespeare indeed chose excellent subjects; the world could afford no better than Macbeth, or Romeo and Juliet, or Othello; he had no theory respecting the necessity of choosing subjects of present import, or the paramount interest attaching to allegories of the state of one's own mind; like all great poets, he knew well what constituted a poetical action; like them, whenever he found such an action, he took it like them too, he found his best in past times. But to these general characteristics of all great poets he added a special one of his own; a gift, namely, of happy, abundant, and ingenious expression, eminent and unrivalled: so eminent as irresistibly to strike the attention first in him, and even to throw into comparative shade his other excellences as a poet. Here has been the mischief. These other excellences were his fundamental excellences as a poet; what distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur, says Goethe, is *Architectonice* in the highest sense; that power of execution, which creates, forms and constitutes: not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration. But these attractive accessories of a poetical work being more easily seized than the spirit of the whole, and these accessories being possessed by Shakespeare in an unequalled degree, a young writer having recourse to Shakespeare as his model runs great risk of being vanquished and absorbed by them and, in consequence, of reproducing, according to the measure of his power, these and these alone ... I have said that the imitators of Shakespeare, fixing their attention on his wonderful gift of expression, having directed their imitation to this, are neglecting his other excellences. These excellences, the fundamental excellences of poetical art, Shakespeare no doubt possessed them,—possessed many of them in a splendid degree; but it may perhaps be doubted whether even he himself did not sometimes give scope to his faculty of expression to the prejudice of a higher poetical duty. For we must never forget that Shakespeare is the great poet he is from his skill in discerning and firmly conceiving an excellent action, from his power of intensely feeling a situation, of intimately associating himself with a character; not from his gift of expression, which rather

even leads him astray, degenerating sometimes into a fondness for curiosity of expression, into an irritability of fancy, which seems to make it impossible for him to say a thing plainly even when the press of the action demands the very directest language, or its level character the very simplest."

We have quoted at length from the preface only to show that Arnold yielded to none in his appreciation of Shakespeare. He said nothing disparaging about him. Placing on record his sincere admiration for Shakespeare, "a name never to be mentioned without reverence," Arnold felt, not without reason, that at times, his followers failing to achieve *architectonice*, spent all their energy on "single thoughts". "The attractive accessories" appeal to them much more than "the spirit of the whole". They cannot see the wood for the trees. The poetry of the mid-Victorian period amply illustrated the truth of Arnold's views. Not the Spasmodists alone, even the poet-laureate occasionally suffered from these disabilities. Arnold's strictures were not on Shakespeare, but his imitators, who could imitate only the vices but could not emulate the virtues of the myriad-minded Shakespeare. Shakespeare, Arnold rightly contended, must not be judged by ordinary standards. "Others abide our question," but he is "free." Only once Arnold "doubted whether even he himself did not sometimes give scope to his faculty of expression to the prejudice of a higher poetical duty." Arnold considered natural magic and moral profundity to be the principal characteristics of great poetry. "In both ways," he said in his essay on Maurice de Guérin, "it illuminates man; it gives him a satisfying sense of reality; it reconciles him with himself and the universe." Shakespeare united in himself both these kinds of interpretation—the naturalistic and the moral. Both these qualities are happily blended in Shakespeare's poetry. So far Arnold is warm in his praise, but the worshipper becomes critical when he says that Shakespeare's "expression tends to become too little sensuous and simple, too much intellectualised."

Again in his essay on "The Literary Influence of Academies," Arnold paid his glowing tribute to Shakespeare: "In England there needs a miracle of genius like Shakespeare's to produce a balance of mind, and a miracle of intellectual delicacy like Dr. Newman's to produce urbanity of style."

Arnold, it should also be remembered, was not an idolater. It was praise tempered by a critical sense. In a letter to Clough

he wrote: "I am beginning the *Tempest*. How ill he often writes: But how often too how incomparably!" The same sentiment was breathed in another letter, "I keep saying Shakespeare, Shakespeare, you are as obscure as life is." In his criticism of Stopford Brooke's estimate of Shakespeare in his *Primer of English literature*, he was, no doubt a little critical about the oh! altitudo sentimentalities of Brooke. He doubted if Shakespeare "was altogether, from end to end, an artist, and the greatest artist the modern world has known." "He is," said Arnold in his *Mixed Essays*, "the richest, the most wonderful, the most powerful, the most delightful of poets; he is not altogether, not even eminently, an artist". It is the praise of a critic, and not the rhapsody of an idolater. Arnold who selected two touchstones from Shakespeare, out of eleven, was not an iconoclast.

Arnold in his preface condemned poems "which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages." But subsequently, there were amazing shifts in his own practice. In the *Lectures on Translating Homer, On the study of Celtic Literature*, and "The study of poetry," he himself tested the greatness of poetry by "single lines." In "The study of poetry," Arnold no longer liked to use the acid-test of "action" and "architectonice." He became an advocate of "touchstones", the chunklets of "single lines." "Short passages, even single lines," he said, "will serve our turn quite sufficiently." Arnold quoted two passages from *Henry IV* and *Hamlet* and traced in them "the possession of the very highest poetical quality." With all passion spent, if there was any, Arnold made almost a dying declaration that Shakespeare was great. The dying testament shows the classicist bowing his head to the supreme beauty and its infinite variety of Shakespeare's poetry which age cannot wither, nor custom stale.

A. C. Swinburne like Carlyle belongs to the exclamatory school of criticism. As a critic, he however, gave the lie to the popular conception that a poet alone can judge another poet. The pre-Raphaelite and Elizabethan elements were combating for supremacy in his mind, and both the strains coloured his vision as a poet and critic. Some of the dramas he had written are based on the themes of the Middle Ages and are essentially Shakespearian. Influenced by Byron, Shelley, Keats, Victor Hugo and Baudelaire, Swinburne was highly impulsive and imaginative. The fire of his muse could fuse all his learning and culture into an incandescent splendour. Like Lamb and Hazlitt, Swinburne had

a passion for every thing Elizabethan. Like a pre-Raphaelite he could not always pin his faith in medievalism. The Elizabethan period was whispering its enchantment to Swinburne, and there is no greater Elizabethan than Shakespeare.

Swinburne's criticism is poetical criticism. He had all the passion and gusto of expression. But he had not the dispassionateness of a critic. He had deep feelings and a passion for beauty. But criticism means the disciplined exploration of a writer's genius. Swinburne, one of the most erratic writers of his age, was never disciplined whether in his ways or in his thought. Carlyle is exclamatory, but his critical perception is unmistakable. Lamb was fanciful. Yet his critical acumen is praiseworthy. Hazlitt is ecstatic, but his criticism has a hard core of reality. Swinburne was beating his luminous wings in the void in vain. He used adjectives in the superlative degree, and even a discerning reader finds it extremely difficult to detect the pin in the haystacks. His expressions are mostly hyperbolic, and it is really difficult to see even the silhouette of Shakespeare amidst the blowing of a pleasant verbal smoke-ring. At places there is a spate of euphemism and soft-peddalling. Some of the passages will just remind one of what Hamlet said to Polonius—"words, words, words."

A passage may be quoted from Swinburne's *A study of Shakespeare* to illustrate the truth of our contention :

"We have now come to that point at the opening of the second stage in his work where the supreme genius of all time begins first to meddle with the mysteries and varieties of human character, to handle its finer and more subtle qualities, to harmonise its more untuned and jarring discords ; giving here and thus the first proof of a power never shared in like measure by the mightiest among the sons of men, a sovereign and serene capacity to fathom the else unfathomable depths of spiritual nature, to solve its else insoluble riddles, to reconcile its else irreconcilable discrepancies. In the first stage Shakespeare had dropped his plummet no deeper into the sea of the spirit of man than Marlowe had sounded before him ; and in the channel of simple emotion no poet could cast surer line with steadier hand than he. Further down in the dark and fiery depths of human pain and mortal passion no soul could search than his who first rendered into speech the aspirations and the agonies of a ruined and revolted spirit. And until Shakespeare found in himself the strength of



eyesight to read and the cunning of handiwork to render those wider diversities of emotion and those further complexities of character which lay outside the range of Marlowe, he certainly cannot be said to have outrun the winged feet, outstripped the fiery flight of his forerunner. In the heaven of our tragic song, the first born star on the forehead of its herald God was not outshone till the full midsummer meridian of that greater Godhead before whom he was sent to prepare a pathway for the sun."

There is no doubt exuberance of feelings. The pyrotechnic display of words dazzles one's eyes, but they perhaps do not stimulate one's thought. Whatever be the quality of his criticism, we shall do well to discuss some of his observations on Shakespeare. "Rhyme," he said, "was Shakespeare's evil angel." In *Romeo and Juliet* rhyme is preponderant, while in *Richard II* and *Richard III* Shakespeare did not yield much to the temptation of rhyme. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, rhyme is almost replaced by blank verse. In the second period of his dramatic literature Shakespeare's language became more limpid, and there was a wonderful synthesis of thought and expression. Ever since Dante no other poet could touch the subtler chords of human nature. In the third period Shakespeare attained in a very large measure sublimity and harmony. It is the poetry and music in Shakespeare's plays that appealed to him most. The reason is not far to seek. Swinburne is a consummate master of lyric, and his lyrics are spun out of rainbow film and moonshot mist. In Tennyson's apt phrase, he is a "reed through which all things blow into music." His poetry must be read by the eye as well as the ear. A perfect wizard in the handling of metre, Swinburne should naturally stress the metrical supremacy of Shakespeare. He found in Shakespeare the cadences of a full orchestra, the grand diapason of music. Swinburne is essentially romantic in his emphasis on Shakespeare's poetry and the lyrical strain in his verse. Shakespeare, to Swinburne, is a poet rather than a play-wright.

Swinburne was an impressionist. He had no sense of the *Architectonice*. Shakespeare's plays never appeal to him as a whole. He passionately loved the parts. One particular character may madden him; one particular passage may transport him to the empyrean heights of joy. Even in his *Three Plays of Shakespeare*, published in the year of his death, his critical manners remained unchanged. This work also is a prose-hymn. Shakes-

peare's plays are again analysed not as a whole but only in chunks. In his comparative study of Shakespeare and Aeschylus, he judged the former with the yardstick of imagination, and the latter in the cold light of reason. And Swinburne who valued the sovereignty of imagination and the primacy of feelings paid his warm tribute to Shakespeare who created a new world of imagination, untainted by the actualities of life.

Walter Pater, though not very popular, nevertheless, occupies a very important place in the history of literary criticism. Pater was neither a formal nor a professional critic. He is partly a prose-poet and partly a critic, as Aldington would like to put it. He was essentially an impressionist, and Longinus must have coloured his critical vision. A man with delicacy of perception, Pater had an esoteric appeal, but the small sheaf of his critical utterances has stood the test of time. Arnold dabbled in politics and social problems, and, therefore, much of what he wrote has lost its importance. Pater lived and wrote in unruffled isolation, and his small corpus of criticism has survived.

In his essay on "Style" he sought to "point out certain qualities of all literature as a fine art which, if they apply to the literature of fact, apply still more to the literature of the imaginative sense of fact, while they apply indifferently to verse and prose, so far as either is really imaginative." De Quincey distinguished between the "Literature of Knowledge" and the "Literature of Power." Taking the cue from De Quincey, Pater distinguished between "good art" and "great art":

"Just in proportion as the writer's aim, consciously or unconsciously, comes to be the transcribing, not of the world, not of mere fact but of his sense of it, he becomes an artist, his work *fine art*, and good art (as I hope ultimately to show) in proportion to the truth of his presentment of that sense." T. S. Eliot is right in holding this view that there is hardly any difference between Arnold's moral idea and Pater's aesthetic idea. For Pater by distinguishing between good art and great art, emphasised the importance of the nobility of subject. It would be paradoxical to say that in the famous essays on *Measure for Measure* and 'Shakespeare's English Kings,' Pater's moral tone tinged his otherwise aesthetic approach. True, it is difficult to pin him down to his aesthetics. But in the essay on *Measure for Measure*, the emphasis is on Charity and Pardon. It is the epitome of Shakespeare's moral judgment. In the so-called "Dark comedies," the

theme is the frailty of the flesh, but the weakness can be overcome. Pater, therefore, pleaded for charity and human frailty. Earthly justice demands Angelo to be killed, but the poetic justice is there, which is seasoned by mercy and softened by compassion. The play is like a parable in which Isabella is an image of the redeemed Christian soul, whose reward is to become the bride of God. Pater did not consider the dark comedies as sufficiently dark. In *Measure for Measure* he believed that the rarer action is in virtue and not in vengeance.

To Pater art and life are identical. A true artist that he was, he wished to be in perpetual quest of the choicest perfume and savour of humanity. Art to him is the supreme expression of the artist. Though often regarded as the exponent of the theory of Art for Art's sake, Pater could never think of art divorced from life.

Pater like Hazlitt and Lamb believed in impressionism. An intuitive critic, Pater though not professedly a poet, had undoubtedly the soul of poetry in his criticism. The volume *Appreciations* contains some very important critical essays of Pater, of which *Measure for Measure*, *Shakespeare's English Kings* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are a treasure of Shakespearian criticism. The essay on *Measure for Measure* has rightly been called "a truly noble piece of criticism", in which Pater exhibited Shakespeare's power of moral interpretation. The play expresses Shakespeare's characteristic morality. It will be a mistake to call it a mere comedy. For below the comic strain there is an undertone of tragedy, and Shakespeare's philosophy of life, far from simple, has been embodied there. The human nature in all its variety and complexity has been laid bare. Even in the face of danger the characters in the play can retain their human dignity. The Duke, Isabella and Mariana are a living challenge to the lust and baser passions of man. The play has no doubt considerable ethical interest. What Shakespeare aims at is that the moral world is highly complex and it is well-nigh impossible to make fair judgments. Ralli has ably summed up Pater's criticism: "He makes us conceive of poetical justice and yearn to realise it. Angelo knows nothing of this justice that lies outside the law. Justice involves rights, and rights are equivalent to facts; therefore to recognize rights is to recognize what a person really is. As this is a matter of feeling and thought it can only be done by sympathy—and so true justice is a finer knowledge through love. For this finer justice, a true respect of persons in our estimate of actions, the characters of the play cry out. It is

an epitome of Shakespeare's moral judgments. Poetry does not always expound morality, but true justice depends on those finer appreciations which poetry cultivates in us the power of making."

*Love's Labour's Lost*, thrown almost in utter neglect, is rehabilitated by Pater for the first time. The wit and poetry of the play compelled his admiration. Shakespeare wrote the play only to show the foppery of deliberate language. Holofernes, Armado and Biron speak on different planes. Holofernes is vulgar, Armado is a banterer, while Biron is trying to achieve perfection. There is a touch of artifice in his character. Pater was not a conventional critic. He looked at the plays of Shakespeare as a connoisseur looks at a picture. With his keen, penetrating vision he fathomed the depth and brought back the inner reality of the work of art. He found what was normally hidden from the human eye. But Pater was not objective. He looked at the plays with his imaginative vision.

Pater's *Shakespeare's English Kings* is a study of the history plays. The irony of kingship is emphasised all through. The kings are mostly average men, placed in peculiar circumstances. King John had a measure of greatness along with heartlessness. Falconbridge had energy along with coarseness. King Henry IV ascended the throne of England, but uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. He was longing for a wink of sleep that was denied to him. Henry V who was Shakespeare's ideal king, did not hold any exalted idea about himself: "I think the King is but a man, as I am." Richard III was a blood-thirsty rapacious king. Richard II was essentially a poet, almost an aesthete who voluptuously feasted upon his half imagined and half true sorrow. He enjoyed the lovely poetry that welled out of his weakness. Caught in the golden labyrinth of his poetry he indulged in the luxury of woe. When every thing failed him, poetry did not. The self-pity of the king distresses us. The whole play has lyrical unity and a single strain of music. "The true imaginative unity of the dramas," said Pater, "is in a vivid single impression left on the mind, not in mechanical limitation of time and place."

Edward Dowden's *Shakespeare: A critical study of his Mind and Art* is one of the most popular books ever written. Furnivall, about whom we have written at length, founded the new Shakespeare Society and regretted that "no book by an Englishman exists which deals in any worthy manner with Shakespeare as a whole." Dowden, a distinguished professor of Dublin, accepted



the challenge and wrote a book that has, with all its limitations, run into innumerable editions. Dowden was sentimental, and what Matthew Arnold said about his *Life of Shelley* could well be said of his Shakespeare, "I am inclined much rather to lament that Professor Dowden has not steadily kept his poetic quality of fervour and picturesqueness more under control.... I believe, that Professor Dowden, of poetic nature himself, and dealing with a poetic nature like Shelley, is so steeped in sentiment by his subject that in almost every page of the biography, the sentiment runs over."

Yet Dowden's work has its significance in the history of Shakespearian criticism. Furnivall wrote: "The profound and generous 'Commentaries' of Gervinus—an honour to a German to have written, a pleasure to an Englishman to read—is still the only book known to me that comes near the true treatment and the dignity of its subject, or can be put into the hands of the student who wants to know the mind of Shakespeare." And hence Dowden wrote a book to be "put into the hands of the student."

Dowden was not an English Gervinus. He was not a mere carbon copy of the German critic. There are no doubt similarities between the two critics. Gervinus used verse-tests, and divided Shakespeare's works into three periods. He also dealt with Shakespeare as a whole. Furnivall, who wrote the preface to the English translation of Gervinus' *commentaries*, was presumably influenced by him while he stated the objective of the New Shakespeare Society which was to study "the growth, the oneness of Shakespeare." Furnivall adopted the "Trial table of the order of Shakespeare's plays," which in effect was the application of the verse tests. He convincingly divided the plays of Shakespeare into four periods, which was a distinct improvement upon Gervinus. Dowden followed in the footsteps of both Gervinus and Furnivall.

Dowden believed that Shakespeare's plays were but the reflection, the transcript of the poet's varied experiences. Shakespeare, a product of the Renaissance, was essentially a lover of life. To Shakespeare the world is no blot or blank. It means intensely, and it means good. Elizabethan drama, and Shakespeare's drama is the consummation of that age, is a bold affirmation of life. Essentially secular and mundane, the plays of Shakespeare vindicate the glory of man. Yet his plays have a spiritual signi-

ficance. Shakespeare lived in the world of reality, and often mused upon the mysteries of existence—mysteries which philosophy cannot dream of. Dowden's principal theory is that human soul is stimulated in touch with the earthly things. This he applied to the Shakespearian characters.

Walter Bagehot tried in his essay 'Shakespeare—the Man' to reconstruct Shakespeare's character and personality. He did not believe that drama was an objective art from which the dramatist always detached himself. A lyric poet is always subjective, and it is not very difficult to reconstruct his personality from his profuse strains of unpremeditated art. From Keats' Ode to a Nightingale, for example, the poet's futility in life, his bitter disappointment in love, his brother's death, his sensitivity to beauty are all easily discernible. But not so in drama. The *Dramatic Personae* are never the spokesmen of the dramatist. Bagehot considered Shakespeare's plays to be at least partially autobiographical. Shakespeare, he contended, is endowed with soaring imagination, but his experience is not meagre. His love of the country is truly great. He has sympathy and fellow-feeling for the underdogs of the society. Dogberry and Verges were made so lovable only because Shakespeare feels drawn to them. Himself a great lover of life, Shakespeare sympathetically draws the character of Falstaff. He has no faith in the middle class. Bagehot was not one of those who believed Shakespeare to be a man of profound learning. Shakespeare read books that he chanced upon.

R. G. Moulton in his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist : A Popular Illustration of Scientific Criticism* recorded his protest against the sentimental school of criticism of Dowden and Furnivall. Criticism, Moulton held, should not be so very subjective and hence his approach was scientific and dispassionate. He was sometimes called a realist also because of his attempt to analyse Shakespeare objectively. We only regret that he was too scientific. "At the best," says Ralli, "his comments are like objects in a museum ; they are facts and they are there because they have served a purpose, but they will never be used again."

Moulton regarded criticism as a branch of inductive science. He called it judicial criticism also, which is actually judgment or criticism based upon comparison. Moulton, it must be conceded, was not a carbon copy of the eighteenth century neo-classicists, who swore by Aristotle and always encouraged dramatists to

adhere to ancient models. But like the classicists he did emphasise the importance of plot. He attributed to Shakespeare some sort of scientific plot-construction. In view of his over-emphasis on scientific approach, Moulton could not distinguish between the conscious and the unconscious working of the mind of the dramatist. And the result is a criticism that is, no doubt, based on honesty of conviction, but is nevertheless dry and uninteresting.

Sidney Lee, famous for his association with the *Dictionary of National Biography*, is a Shakespearian scholar of considerable distinction. His reputation as a Shakespearian scholar stands like a rock foursquare to the winds of Time. His *Life of Shakespeare*, *Stratford-on-Avon from the Earliest Times to the Death of Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare and the Modern Stage* and *Shakespeare and the Italian Renaissance* are all works of a scholar, who preferred truth and discrimination to aestheticism. He was also the editor of the Oxford facsimile edition of the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. Lee was sick of the aesthetic and sentimental studies of Shakespeare, so very characteristic of the Victorian age. He did not for obvious reasons like to add another aesthetic and interpretative study to the plethora, already in existence. For he sincerely believed that it would be "a work of supererogation." His principle was to expose and not to impose his personal views. This method can well be called the historic method, for Lee scrupulously avoided passions and prejudices.

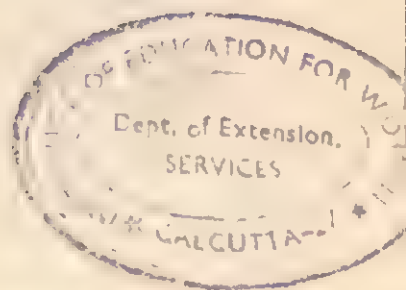
Beside Lee's monumental *Life of William Shakespeare*, Nicholas Rowe's biography seems to be almost a child's play. In his criticism of Shakespeare's plays Lee compared Shakespeare with his predecessors and contemporaries. Compared with Lyly Shakespeare must be regarded superior. Lee's analysis of the plays is admirable. Unlike Dowden, Brandes or Frank Harris of later times, Sidney Lee insisted that Shakespeare's dramatic art was impersonal. To reconstruct Shakespeare's character and personality from his writing is impossible, and the attempt is not worthwhile. The philosophy of life of Shakespeare is certainly revealed in his plays. His moral sense is also laid bare. A product of the Renaissance, Shakespeare had a passion for life. But a critic should not read further meanings into his plays. In the Elizabethan age playwrights often wrote in collaboration. Lee had the critical acumen to sift the Shakespearian gold from amidst various accretions.

Lee with his extraordinary range of knowledge and grasp of the subject could easily explain the allusions which proved a bugbear or a conundrum to many a critic. But his comments on Shakespeare's sonnets are still read with considerable interest. The sonnets, he maintained, are not of equal merit. Some have reached the empyrean heights of poetry and rapture, while some have degenerated into clichés, quibbles and conceits. It is not wise to consider his sonnets autobiographical. In the Elizabethan age sonnets normally did not tend to be autobiographical. And Shakespeare did not presumably break with the tradition. The themes dealt with in the sonnets were also conventional.

Arthur Symonds deserves mention as a Shakespearian critic, though his *Studies in Elizabethan Drama* deals with many dramatists besides Shakespeare. His remarks on the plays are eminently readable. Like a romantic critic he assessed Shakespeare more as a poet than as a dramatist.

F. S. Boas is immensely popular with the students for his *Shakespeare and his Predecessors*, but his claims as an original critic are rather poor. As a survey of pre-Elizabethan and Elizabethan drama it is handy and has been written with knowledge and confidence.

Stopford Brooke, though a Victorian by birth, wrote most of his memorable essays on Shakespeare in the early years of the twentieth century. His earliest work on *Richard III* appeared in the Shakespeare Society Transactions. With a fine critical sensibility Brooke analysed the superiority of Shakespeare over Marlowe, admitting at the same time that the former might have been influenced by the latter. In his *On Ten Plays of Shakespeare*, and *Ten More Plays of Shakespeare* published a few years later, Brooke's poetic sensibilities were in evidence. A clergyman by profession, Brooke was not a mere moralist. He had aesthetic appreciation in a large measure. He could find in Shakespeare's plays a synthesis of the good and the beautiful.





## Twentieth Century Shakespearian Criticism

If the Victorian criticism is a continuation of Romantic criticism, the twentieth century criticism is a distinct departure from it. The twentieth century is in many respects the age of scepticism and interrogation. The Victorians normally looked upon everything with a dogmatic certainty. The twentieth century looked upon the accepted values of its predecessors with a sarcastic lifting of its eyebrows. The twentieth century critics had a ceaseless desire to probe and question what was almost sacrosanct in the Victorian age.

What is true of literature is equally true of criticism. Twentieth century Shakespearian criticism as a reaction to the subjective and idolatrous tendencies of the Romantics, became objective, dispassionate and impersonal. The Oh! altitudo sentimentalities of Carlyle were replaced by a spirit of disinterested enquiry. As a counterblast to the spate of adulation Gustave Rümelin had published in 1864 his *Shakespeare Studies by a Realist*, but amidst the universal hallelujah and the deafening acclamations of worshippers, Rümelin's voice was almost a cry in the wilderness. In the twentieth century the spirit of Rümelin was distinctly felt and zealously emulated. We should, however, remember that the objective approach to Shakespeare does not mean denigration or debunking of Shakespeare. The critics did not like to invest Shakespeare with glory. The aureole round the face of the bard was artificially created. They liked to see him in correct perspective.

The twentieth century critics have been indefatigable in their research, and the result is an immense critical literature on Shakespeare. Criticism today has endless ramifications. Louis B. Wright of the Folger Library has rightly said: "The field of Shakespeare criticism today is so vast and has such a ramification of specialised topics, from aesthetic appreciation to Freudian analysis, that non-specialist literary scholars, much less other folk, find it difficult to sort out the significant from the trivial."

Kenneth Muir echoes the same feelings. "The yearly flood of Shakespeariana submerges all but the strongest swimmers and makes it increasingly difficult to see Shakespeare steadily, and see him whole." What used to be called criticism in a narrow sense in the Victorian or an earlier age has now been strengthened and amplified by the new branches of knowledge, hitherto unexplored. Logical positivism, psychology, word-artistry, symbolical meaning, a correct history of the Elizabethan stage conventions, to name only a few, were all laid under contribution. The editorial problems and the problems of emendation were nothing new in the twentieth century. The eighteenth century critics like Rowe, Theobald, Warburton, Johnson, Steevens, Capell and Malone tried to tackle these problems, but in the twentieth century the approach has become more critical, scholarly and analytical. In many respects the legacy of the eighteenth century is discernible in the twentieth. The empirical eighteenth century set so much store by good sense and common sense. It was, as has already been pointed out, the age of prose and reason. The Romantics underrated good sense, but in the twentieth century, good sense is a supreme force. When F. R. Leavis calls one of his books *Common Pursuit*, he is definitely guided by common sense.

Shakespeare's popularity in spite of the relative objectivity of the critics is not on the wane. Ibsen, Strindberg and other dramatists were no doubt the rage of the day. Problem plays, discussion plays or *pièce à thèse* swamped the stage for a considerable time, but the romantic Shakespeare who wrote of enchanting Illyria, has not outlived his importance. Shakespeare had his entrances and exits. But in the twentieth century he has come to stay as more than a national idol. He has crossed the frontiers of nations and political and geographical divisions. On the occasion of the Quater-Centenary celebrations of Shakespeare's birth the world has witnessed with awe and admiration how the bard of Avon has transcended the limitations of time and space and has become a rich heritage for all countries. At the beginning of the twentieth century Sir Henry Irving and Johnston Forbes-Robertson made Shakespeare's plays eminently stageworthy. The tradition continues even today. Millions of people all over the world still feast upon the witchery of his poetry and the magical incantation of his dramas. Bernard Shaw who was never tired of crossing the path of his predecessor said :

"It is one of my eccentricities to be old-fashioned in my artistic tastes. For instance, I am fond—unaffectedly fond—of Shakespeare's plays." Shaw also praised Shakespeare as a constructive thinker. "I do not profess," said Shaw, "to write better plays. No man will ever write a better tragedy than *Lear*. I wish I could write a beautiful comedy like *Twelfth Night*."

Granville Barker and William Poel revolutionised the technique of the production of Shakespeare's plays. They also immensely popularised Shakespeare. Apart from the theatrical critics there have been innumerable critics in the course of the last sixty five years, who have confined themselves to bibliographical and textual criticism. The scholars are making an intensive study of the Elizabethan manners and conventions. In the words of G. B. Harrison, "The scholar says in effect, this Shakespeare has been dead for more than three hundred years. Times, manners, and ideas have changed greatly. To understand him, therefore, we must know his environment and examine his plays in the conditions of their original composition." These scholars include Greg, Pollard, McKerrow and Dover Wilson.

"The attitude of the critic," says G. B. Harrison, "is that great literature is timeless and therefore perpetually modern. He is not concerned with an antiquity but with certain works of dramatic art and how they concern him." These critics are innumerable, and they have studied Shakespeare from different points of view. It will be our endeavour in the following pages to sum up their views.

"The producer and the actor," let us quote G. B. Harrison again, "...say, 'Our business is with the theatre of today, its customs and conventions, its staging and its audience. We must therefore act Shakespeare's plays in a manner which will be understood by a modern audience of mixed interests, knowledge and appreciation—that is, if we produce them at all.'"

"Assuredly that criticism of Shakespeare will alone be genial which is reverential," said Coleridge more than one hundred and fifty years ago. The Victorians accepted this view as an article of faith. The twentieth century critics paused and decided to test the whole thing anew. The sentimental dithyrambs they scrupulously avoided. And a good number of critics wanted to present facts and no fiction. Sidney Lee paved the way in his *Life of Shakespeare*. Sir E. K. Chambers in his two volume *William Shakespeare—A Study of Facts and Problems* offered a mass of informa-

tion about Shakespeare's life. The very title of his work is highly significant. He asserted that he endeavoured to sift facts out of a farrago of fiction and hearsay. Chambers' four-volume *Elizabethan Stage* has an encyclopaedic sweep and is an eloquent testimony to the meticulous scholarship of the author. The two-volume *Shakespeare's England*, sponsored by Sir Walter Raleigh is quite as remarkable as Chambers' works. Many scholars were concerned with the authenticity of Shakespeare's plays. The study of Shakespeare apocrypha engaged considerable attention. Some were concerned with the sources of Shakespeare's plays. But it must be said in all fairness to the Textual critics that their contributions have more affected our understanding of Shakespeare's work than the biographers and interpretative critics and scholars who specialised in other branches of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Innumerable studies have been inspired by Shakespeare's personality and his plays in the course of the last sixty five years, and even the apparently humble questions have been explored with meticulous care. Textual criticism is today looming larger and larger and is growing transcendent and paramount.

In spite of Warton's warning that "general criticism is on all subjects useless and unentertaining," the general criticism of Shakespeare continues unabated. This type of criticism does not tend to bring any thing into focus. It is just a general study of Shakespeare not from the scholar's but from the common reader's point of view. The general criticism maintains the tradition of English literature and is immensely popular with the students and examinees.

The main tendencies of the Shakespearian criticism of the twentieth century have been ably summed up by G. H. Herford in his *A Sketch of Recent Shakespearian Investigation 1893-1923*. Shakespearian critics, Herford maintains, are normally of three types. One school of critics interpret Shakespeare as an artist. The second school is engaged upon interpreting Shakespeare as a man. They try to reconstruct Shakespeare's life, his aspirations, his character and personality from his plays. The history of the third school is generally a history of the shifting emphasis laid now upon the interpretation of Shakespeare as an artist and now upon the interpretation of Shakespeare as a man. All these critics are more or less subjective and speculative. Yet the first and the second schools of opinion are in conflict with each other. The aesthetic or impressionistic criticism is almost out of the



picture. It is all due to our growing knowledge of the Elizabethan theatre and conventions. According to Herford, the picture of a great artist's soul, evolving in its four successive periods, each with its expressive level has lost its importance—the trend is now in the opposite direction—towards a Shakespeare who was a Globe shareholder first and last, whose technique was a tissue of compliances with the taste of the audience in which his own taste had no part.

To call Shakespeare a slave of circumstances and to say that he catered to the tastes of the Elizabethan groundlings and his own taste had no part are half-truths. It goes without saying that the psychology of genius is complex and is almost indefinable. And hence the realistic and historic critics like Stoll and Schücking made, no doubt, a close and methodical study of Shakespeare's stage and the conventions of his age, and looked askance at the imaginative, interpretative and subjective critics. They did not think highly of critics like Dowden, Brandes and Frank Harris who reconstructed Shakespeare's personality out of his work. Brandes found in Shakespeare's plays, traces of a man of cosmopolitan culture. Shakespeare, he believed, had a contact with the master-currents of the intellectual life of Europe. According to Herford, Brandes' weakness is to discover too constantly not merely the sap of Shakespeare's vitality, but the accent of his voice, the echo of his personal joy and sorrow. Frank Harris, a journalist of distinction but with no pretensions to scholarship, carried his thesis too far. In his *Shakespeare the Man* and *The Women of Shakespeare* Frank Harris categorically said that Shakespeare was not impersonal. In Romeo, Hamlet, Macbeth, the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, Posthumus and Prospero, the portrait of Shakespeare is clearly seen.

G. B. Harrison has spoken of the three kinds of Shakespearian study—scholarly, literary and dramatic. But for our purpose we shall group the schools of criticism under four principal heads: Textual, Theatrical, Historical or Realistic and Symbolical. There are many other schools of criticism, which normally will not come within our purview.

The views of some critics deserve analysis, who precisely do not belong to any of the four schools mentioned above. Lytton Strachey, for example, is the least idolatrous, and yet to describe his approach as dispassionate and objective, would be a fallacy. In his essay on *Shakespeare's Final Period*, Strachey launched his

attack on the sentimental idealism of Dowden and Furnivall. In his opinion, Shakespeare's "ultimate mood of grave serenity," emphasised by Dowden was a sentimental picture, but was completely divorced from reality. Shakespeare, in fact, was passing through a period of boredom. Strachey had no sympathy for the critics, who believed in the chronological order of the plays of Shakespeare. Dowden, Furnivall, Sidney Lee and Gollancz generally came in for criticism for their sentimental approach to Shakespeare. Lee in spite of his historic approach accepted the orthodox view of the succession of gaiety, of tragedy and of serenity of meditative romance. According to Dowden, Shakespeare "did at last attain to the serene self-possession which he had sought with such persistent efforts." Furnivall found in the last plays the spirit of "forgive and forgiving, full of the highest wisdom and peace ; at one with family and friends and foes, in harmony with Avon's glow and Stratford's level meads, Shakespeare closed his life on earth." Sir I. Gollancz traced the spirit of "forgiveness, reconciliation and peace." Strachey who had debunked many of the accepted views of the Victorians, attacked all of them and summed up his arguments as follows :

Shakespeare is "half-enchanted by visions of beauty and loveliness, and half bored to death ; on the one side inspired by a soaring fancy to the singing of ethereal songs, and on the other urged by a general disgust to burst occasionally through his torpor into bitter and violent speech." Strachey attacked the cosy idealism and sentimentalism of those critics who tried to reconstruct Shakespeare's moral development from his plays. But Strachey himself was in his own way subjective.

A. H. Thorndike in his *Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakespeare* threw light on the plays of Shakespeare's final period. Thorndike made a close study of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, and pointed out the striking resemblances between the plays. He is of the opinion that there had been remarkable changes in the contemporary fashions of drama. Tragi-comedy or dramatic romance became the rage of the day. Beaumont and Fletcher, younger as they were, had been the pioneers in this particular branch of drama. Shakespeare caught up with them and wrote his Dramatic Romances. Thorndike was defending his thesis, and, therefore, as Kenneth Muir suggests that "although some cross-fertilization was natural, Shakespeare's development might not have been very different

if Beaumont and Fletcher had never lived." For "we can see from *Pericles* that Shakespeare had already broken new ground."

T. R. Lounsbury in his *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* is a typical Victorian in his attitude. Almost like Bowdler, he was worried about Shakespeare's bawdry and indecencies. W. B. Yeats, who has said very little about Shakespeare, deserves to be remembered for his essay on the historical plays of Shakespeare in his *Ideas of Good and Evil*. Yeats, the romantic visionary must have written this essay directly under the influence of Pater. The thematic resemblance between their essays is remarkable. And like Pater Yeats also loved King Richard II, who was all the while indulging in the luxury of woe and weaving golden poetry out of his bitter tears.

### *Bradley on Shakespeare*

A. C. Bradley wrote all his essays on Shakespeare in the early years of the twentieth century, and yet he did not share with the modern critics any of their qualities. He was an anachronism of the twentieth century. For he was maintaining the aesthetic traditions of Coleridge and Hazlitt. By his emphasis on character he is in line with Morgann and the Romantic critics of the nineteenth century. "Bradley's *Shakespearian Tragedy* (1904)," says Kenneth Muir, "was at once the culmination of the kind of criticism which had started a hundred years before—that of Morgann and the great Romantics—and it was also to be for a whole generation the truest and most profound book ever written on Shakespeare. Indeed, when all deductions have been made, it probably retains that high position today with the majority of readers."

In point of ideas Bradley belongs to the nineteenth century. And whatever his critics might say he is undoubtedly the greatest figure in Shakespearian criticism in the twentieth century specially in respect of tragedies. Bradley has an intuitive insight, which we do not find in most of the twentieth century critics. Intensely subjective, Bradley has a trained and kindled imagination. Yet he is more methodical and scientific in his approach than Coleridge and Hazlitt.

Bradley was profoundly influenced by Hegelian dialectics. The idea of the conflict between two forces is the hard core of Hegelian philosophy. Hegel spoke of the conflict between the greater good and the lesser good, while Bradley traced in the

Shakespearian Tragedies the conflict between good and evil. Bradley is the first Shakespearian critic who has investigated the nature of tragedy. His approach is interpretative, and his interpretation of the four major tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *King Lear* in his *Shakespearian Tragedy*, and his interpretation of *Antony* and *Cleopatra* in the *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* also deserve mention. In all these studies he is building on Hegel's foundation, but, as C. H. Herford points out, he withdraws from Hegelian idealism in his searching analysis of the metaphysical implications of Shakespearian Tragedy. Bradley is not concerned with the story and fate of Hamlet or Othello. Their stories are, no doubt, unhappy, and their fate is essentially tragic. But Bradley speculated on the very nature of the universe which shapes human destiny. The commotion in the moral world and the contending forces in the universe are reflected in the life and tragedy of the tragic heroes of Shakespeare.

Bradley is not a follower of Dowden, Furnivall or Frank Harris, who tried to reconstruct Shakespeare's character and personality from his dramas. But in his British Academy Lecture, "*Shakespeare the Man*" Bradley struck a compromise between the sentimental attitude of Brandes and Harris and the objective and negative approach of Sidney Lee.

It is not out of place if we point out what precisely Bradley had done in his Shakespearian studies. Though a profound classical scholar, Bradley has not subscribed to Aristotle's tenet that Plot is the soul of Tragedy. He has exalted character far above everything else. The poetic world, he believes, is much smaller and yet intenser than the real world, and is related to it. Bradley believes that the world of imagination is the gateway to truth. He does not think it necessary that a Shakespearian critic should have a thorough acquaintance with the Elizabethan stage and conventions. Textual criticism also does not interest him. For he sincerely believes that Research, though toilsome, is easy, while imagination though delightful is difficult. Bradley attributed absolute life and reality to the Shakespearian characters. Though so very romantic in his attitude, Bradley cannot appreciate the poetry of the plays. To him Shakespeare is a dramatist, a playwright but not a poet. In other respects, however, what was in an embryonic state in Coleridge found its culmination in Bradley's criticism. Bradley is also a speculator. Is it not an idle speculation as to what Cordelia would have done were she Desdemona?



Bradley is still a dynamic force although the defects of Shakespeare he has pointed out with so much of unction, are no longer regarded as defects at all. Johnson once drew up an indictment against Shakespeare. His allegations against Shakespeare are now relegated to limbo. And his appreciation with all its defects is regarded as a culmination and the best example of over two centuries of Shakespearian criticism. Bradley complains of the anachronisms in Shakespeare's plays. He is not happy over Shakespeare's metaphors and high-falutin style. His characters, Bradley regrets, speak almost in the same vein. In fact, the speeches are indistinguishable. The soliloquies also come in for criticism. The use of the "gnomic" passages is also objected to. The modern critics who have studied closely the Elizabethan literary and stage conventions, will say that the defects of Shakespeare have been pointed out by Bradley only through sheer ignorance. In the Elizabethan age these were not defects but artistic and dramatic accessories. "And this fact," says Kenneth Muir, "is not, of course, due to the superiority of modern critics, but rather to the fact that the conventions of the Elizabethan stage are now better understood and appreciated."

Lamb once said that *King Lear* was not stageworthy. Bradley echoes his sentiments and feels that Shakespeare's tragedies will not happily lend themselves to stage performances. The readers' mind can much better appreciate the plays. Bradley is essentially romantic in this regard. His arguments can be summed up as follows. The vagueness in the matters of time and place, while it enhances the imaginative effect of the play on the reader, causes confusion in the spectator's mind. While the play may contain some good acting scenes, the poetic effects of the really great and significant scenes are lost on the spectator, the spectator being "under the tyranny of the eye," and thus aware of the stage characters only as "mere particular men and women without significance beyond themselves." And the strongest argument of Bradley, which is, in fact, an elaboration of Lamb's contention, is that the vast bulk of the material, while it creates in the readers' mind the imaginative effect of "a great commotion in the moral world," involves the necessity of unravelling a great many threads in the latter part of the play, and causes the stageplay to drag, despite its beautiful symmetry and strong contrasts. Granville Barker has met this challenge and has convincingly proved that Shakespeare's tragedies can be put on the stage.

Bradley sincerely believes that the characters in Shakespeare's plays are living personalities. To him they are not a drollery, but real men and women, throbbing with emotions and pulsating with life. Their personalities, their laughter and tears, longings and aspirations, passions and prejudices, motions and emotions can be analysed and dissected. So far so good. Bradley goes so far as to suggest that even the past history of the characters, which the audience and the spectators are not supposed to know, can also be critically examined. And hence Bradley has recourse to various kinds of speculation. He reflects on the childhood of Cordelia. He speculates on what the spirited Cordelia would have done in the docile and submissive Desdemona's place. His note on "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" has almost raised a hornet's nest. L. C. Knights in his article, "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" has rallied Bradley. He does not believe that the Shakespearian characters are living men and women. "The centre of the tragedy," says Bradley, "may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action... What we feel strongly, as a tragedy advances to its close, is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of men, and that the main source of these deeds is character. The dictum that, with Shakespeare, 'character is destiny' is no doubt an exaggeration...but it is the exaggeration of a vital truth." In L. C. Knights' opinion, this standpoint of Bradley is the source of all his weakness. That is why he imagines Posthumus in Othello's place. Othello in Posthumus' place and speculates upon Hamlet's whereabouts while his father was dead. Knights contends that a Shakespearian play is a dramatic poem. "It uses action, gesture, formal grouping and symbols, and it relies upon the general conventions governing Elizabethan plays. But, we cannot too often remind ourselves, its end is to communicate a rich and controlled experience by means of words—words used in a way to which, without some training, we are no longer accustomed to respond. To stress in the conventional way character or plot or any of the other abstractions that can be made, is to impoverish the total response." To buttress his position L. C. Knights quotes G. Wilson Knight: "We should not look for perfect verisimilitude to life, but rather see each play as an expanded metaphor, by means of which the original vision has been projected into forms roughly correspondent with actuality, conforming thereto with greater or less exactitude

according to the demands of its nature... The persons, ultimately, are not human at all, but purely symbols of a poetic vision."

It is not on this score alone that Bradley has come in for criticism. He has been charged with lack of historic knowledge and an excess of philosophical speculations. He completely forgets that Shakespeare is essentially a man of the theatre of the Tudor age. Bradley's criticism betrays his colossal ignorance of the Elizabethan stage conventions. He takes the dramas as plays and not poems. To him Shakespearian characters are not plastic symbols but living men and women. Yet after all this is said, H. B. Charlton ecstatically says: "I was bred on him...he opened a door, ... I have found no single volume which seems so securely to admit one into Shakespeare's tragic universe as does his."

Lily Campbell's two interesting and stimulating essays on Bradley deserve mention. At the time of the publication of *Shakespearian Tragedy*, scholars and critics took to explaining Bradley and oriented all Shakespearian criticism to the new sun. His criticism was, to many, a gospel truth. But with modern psychological research Shakespeare began to be interpreted in the light of the Elizabethan ideas. Bradley, as Lily Campbell points out, imposes a moral pattern upon the work of a sixteenth century mind. He also is fallacious when he "makes his own definition of tragedy as centering about action issuing from character or character issuing in action." Bradley ignores the Elizabethan acceptance of the abnormal states of mind. Lily Campbell is categorical in her statement that Bradley failed to distinguish between a dramatic character and a person in real life of whom one may have had occasional revealing glimpses." Bradley has, in fact, tried to illustrate Coleridge's theory that the characters of the *dramatis personae*, like those in real life, are to be inferred by the reader:—they are not told to him." Lily Campbell describes it as a critical fallacy. And innumerable critics have regarded it a fallacy. But when all the critics will be tired of their assaults Bradley's *Shakespearian Tragedy* will remain one of the classics of Shakespearian criticism, which posterity will not willingly let die.

Besides the studies of the four great tragedies, Bradley's criticism of *Antony and Cleopatra* and "*The Rejection of Falstaff*" deserve mention. Bradley is a little sentimental in his essay on the Rejection of Falstaff, and the warmth of feeling he shows there is reminiscent of the manner in which Morgann approached the

subject. Bradley forgets that there is no question of sentiment or individual interest for Prince Henry the moment he becomes Henry V. Henry has ceased to be an individual and Falstaff's friend, and to consider the situation in the light of personal relationship is extremely unfair to Shakespeare. Aristotle emphasised that drama was mainly a matter of action. In Elizabethan romantic drama there was an undue emphasis on character at the expense of plot and the more important art of action. Shakespeare like most of his contemporaries was very much interested in character as Character and sometimes he forgot all other considerations. The result is that Falstaff grows out of all proportions. Shakespeare should not have allowed Falstaff to become so important. This fact escaped Bradley's notice, and hence his sentimental musings on the rejection of Falstaff.

Bradley has his critics ; he has his warm admirers too. In fact, even his critics have not always been free from his influence. Kenneth Muir has referred to just a few of the Bradleyites—John Palmer, H. B. Charlton, Agnes Mure Mackenzie, George Gordon and Thomas Marc Parrott ; but we think there are many others besides. Palmer's *Shakespeare's Political Characters* and *Comic Characters of Shakespeare* are drawn with sympathy and discernment. H. B. Charlton, who rapturously said, "For my own part, I am a dovout Bradleyite," had all the scholarly humility in his *Shakespearian Tragedy* and *Shakespearian Comedy*. In her analysis of characters in *The Women in Shakespeare's Plays*, Agnes Mure Mackenzie has made distinct improvement upon Mrs. Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke's appraisal. George Gordon has written little, but his book on *Shakespearian Comedy*, short and fragmentary as it is, will stand the test of time. Parrott in his *Shakespearian Comedy* emphasises the importance of character and follows in the footsteps of Bradley.

### *Raleigh on Shakespeare*

Sir Walter Raleigh is an anti-Bradleyite in his small but eminently readable *Shakespeare*. Raleigh's book is not meant for scholars. But it is noteworthy for its balanced view of Shakespeare. As Halliday rightly observes, "Raleigh turns away not only from Dowden's sentiment but also from the excesses of Coleridge to the 'Cool and manly utterances of Dryden, Johnson and Pope with a heightened sense of the value of moderation and candour.'" Raleigh undertakes the task of George Eliot and John Morley. He



attempts to interpret Shakespeare in terms of Elizabethan England. It is indeed a distinct step in contradistinction to the method of the Romantics. Raleigh cares as much for history as for literary appreciation. But the chief reason for which he has a secure niche in the history of Shakespearian criticism is that he broke with the romantic tradition. "Our sin," Raleigh said, "is not indifference, but superstition.... His [Shakespeare's] poetry has been used like wedding cake, not to eat but to dream upon... Let us make an end of this, and do justice to Shakespeare the craftsman." This utterance is all the more significant as it is the battle-cry of all the critics of the modern age who were out to break into the Romantic stronghold without apology.

It goes without saying that the twentieth century critics are far more scholarly than their predecessors. Even the biographies of Shakespeare are not a mere record of wishful romances and hearsay. The latest researches are all incorporated in their works. Before dwelling at length on the bibliographers and textual critics, whose scholarship in their field of study is beyond dispute, we shall give a short synoptic survey of the scholarly endeavours of certain other critics. Sir E. M. Thompson, a palaeographer of distinction, made an intensive study of Shakespeare's handwriting. It was at his instance that a few scholars addressed themselves to the task and succeeded in identifying three pages of the manuscript play, *Thomas More*. G. L. Kittredge has added scholarly notes to his one-volume edition of Shakespeare. Leslie Hotson has discovered many documents and concluded that Justice Shallow and Slender are but the portraits of Justice Gardiner and his stepson. His work on the sonnets also deserves special mention. He has run counter to the generally accepted theory and has tried to prove that the sonnets were written before 1590. Mark Eccles in his *Shakespeare in Warwickshire* has discovered a storehouse of valuable manuscripts that have thrown light upon several aspects of Shakespeare. T. W. Baldwin has done splendid work in his *Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure and Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*. Robert Bridges believed Shakespeare to be but a slave of his audience. In his essay—*The Influence of the Audience on Shakespeare's Drama* (1907), he remarked :

"Shakespeare should not be put into the hands of the young without the warning that the foolish things in his plays were written to please the foolish, the filthy for the filthy, and the brutal for the brutal ; and that, if out of veneration for his genius

we are led to admire and even tolerate such things, we may be thereby not conforming ourselves to him, but only degrading ourselves to the level of his audience, and learning contamination from those wretched beings who can never be forgiven their share in preventing the greatest poet and dramatist of the world from being the best artist."

Alfred Harbage in his *Shakespeare's Audience* (1941), held a different view. The Elizabethan audience, he maintained, were not crude and primitive. They could appreciate the subtleties and nuances of poetry, wit and humour. The Elizabethan tradition was a rich tradition—"the tradition of the theatre of the nation, with its impulse to go to the people, and the tradition of Christian humanism, which was lighting up the minds of those people."

Abercrombie has also to say something of the influence of the audience on Shakespeare.

"What Elizabethan audiences chiefly delighted to see, and what an Elizabethan dramatist had to give them (and, being himself an Elizabethan, delighted to give them) was a spectacle of the variety of life... This demand was the governing condition under which Shakespeare worked."

## Textual Criticism

Since 1904 some critics have been doing revolutionary work in the field of textual criticism. G. B. Harrison has given an admirable analysis of what they have done ; and we shall do well to summarise what he says about it. The edition of the works of Thomas Nashe, the Elizabethan pamphleteer, was edited by R. B. McKerrow ; and *the Diary and Papers of Philip Henslowe* was edited by W. W. Greg. They made an intensive study of the Elizabethan printing houses, thoughts, ideas and history. They also made a wonderful study of bibliography. At their instance a good many critics began to examine old texts and manuscripts, and their researches have been rewarding.

*Henslowe's Diary* is an authentic contemporary record. It is, in fact, an indispensable document of the Elizabethan stage-history. "The papers of Henslowe," G. B. Harrison says, "include contracts with actors, letters from dramatists, the agreement with the builder for building the Fortune Theatre, Private letters, inventories of costumes and properties, and other documents which are invaluable." J. P. Collier, whom we have met before, forged and added certain notes to *Henslowe's Diary*. For nearly a century the whole thing was discredited and jettisoned, only to be revived by W. W. Greg. All the accretions of Collier were removed, and a genuine and authentic text was presented. *Henslowe's Diary*, thus edited with meticulous care, appeared between 1904 and 1907. "As a result," says G. B. Harrison, "scholars for a number of years had the field to themselves. It was quickly realized that once the conditions under which Shakespeare wrote were known, much light would be thrown on the making of his plays. For a time the philosopher—for Bradley was philosopher rather than scholar—gave way to the antiquarian." Bradley at his best was but the torch-bearer of Morgann, Hazlitt and Coleridge. But Greg broke new grounds altogether. A band of scholars dug deep into the quarry of the condition of the Elizabethan dramatic production. The history of the dramatic companies, the actors, producers, managers, the audience was all unearthed. The dramas were written and staged with a view to catering to the taste of the Elizabethan

groundlings. Shakespeare in spite of his transcendent genius was essentially a man of his age. He had to consider the passions and prejudices of his audience while writing his plays. Shakespeare was at once the creator and creature of his age. Shakespearian scholars will not accept the texts as they have been transmitted to us. The archives must be ransacked; the original manuscripts should be tracked down; and the scholars must study whether the early texts were by a single hand or were written in collaboration. After the stage performance the plays were printed in the Quarto form. The scholars are to collate the prompter's copy and the printed Quarto, and the discrepancies, if any, are to be detected and accounted for. There might be both good Quartos and bad Quartos. The Quartos must be compared with the Folio, that appeared in 1623. Even at that stage the scholars will not stop. The second Folio of 1632, the third Folio of 1663 and the fourth folio of 1685 should be consulted, and the changes, typographical or otherwise, that have occurred are to be minutely examined. The emendations, suggested by the eminent scholars of the eighteenth century like Rowe, Theobald, Warburton, Pope, Johnson, Capell, Malone and Steevens should be gone into. "All these factors," says Harrison, "will affect the printed text which the reader of today uses, and which also gives the actor his lines for a performance on the stage."

A Shakespearian scholar must have a thorough acquaintance with the Elizabethan period. "He must," says Harrison again, "be familiar with the current ideas of the times, of literary criticism, science, psychology, history, morals, religion. All these affected Shakespeare immediately; they passed through the filter of his personality and were largely the material of his drama; for he, no less than other dramatists, supplied his audience with thoughts which were immediately interesting and exciting." Pollard, Greg and McKerrow, we have already said, concerned themselves with the canons of the texts of Shakespeare. They are popularly known as the members of the "London School". Their works are mainly bibliographical and not interpretative. Dover Wilson, F. P. Wilson and Alice Walker have maintained the tradition of the three pioneers, noted above.

A. W. Pollard maintained the tradition of R. B. McKerrow and W. W. Greg and went a step ahead. In his *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates*, published in 1917, he proved beyond doubt that "the earliest of Shakespeare's texts were often set up



directly from Shakespeare's own manuscript by a printer who followed his copy closely." These discoveries have been extremely fruitful. And hence scholars no longer look upon the texts of Shakespeare as something sacrosanct. They regard them with the sceptical lifting of their eye-brows and an ironical grin. The famous Cambridge Edition of Shakespeare has been dislodged from its eminence, and even now no authorised version of Shakespeare has been accepted. One example will serve to illustrate the point. In the Elizabethan dramas there were no divisions of scenes or acts. The places were also not located. In the Elizabethan stage there was no scenery, and that is why the change of place could not be pointed out. "The editors," says Harrison, "have tampered with the texts, sometimes by brilliant guessing producing sense from corrupt passages, but more commonly by erecting an eighteenth century facade to an Elizabethan play."

The eighteenth century editors often tampered with the punctuation and the arrangement of the lines in the plays of Shakespeare. The result has been disastrous. The subtle shades of meaning and nuances have been lost in this editorial process, and the readers and the audience have been deprived of the spirit of what exactly Shakespeare had written. The twentieth century scholars have been zealously cleansing the Augean stable, and their efforts have not gone in vain. To conclude, "the attitude of the scholar," says Harrison, "is, then, that Shakespeare was an Elizabethan with the advantages and limitations of his age. His plays were subject to the conditions of his times. He was, in short, a man who provided the plays for a particular company of actors. It is a sound kind of study revealing much and vastly increasing the enjoyment of a play. Scholarship can be misused and if the scholar merely regards Shakespeare as an antiquity and forgets that he was not much more than a man who wrote plays for an Elizabethan theatre, it is the business of the critic and producer to correct that impression."

Now that we have an outline of what the Shakespearian scholars of the modern age have done or intend to do, we suppose, we should be a little more critical and analytical in our assessment of their achievement. A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, R. B. McKerrow, Dover Wilson, R. W. Chambers and Alice Walker are the greatest names in the fields of Shakespearian scholarship. R. B. McKerrow suggested a study in editorial method in hi

*Prolegomena for the Oxford Shakespeare*, published in 1939. The procedure and principles of editing given in this book are worthy of serious consideration. According to Greg, the procedure suggested by McKerrow, commendable as it is, is not wholly satisfying. And hence he himself suggested in his *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, "a somewhat more elaborate and less rigid procedure." "The fact is," says Greg, "that conditions in the Elizabethan dramas are so varied and often so complex that it is almost impossible to frame any proposition that shall be generally valid or lay down any principle that shall apply in every case. No sooner have we formulated a rule for our guidance than it is found to need qualifying, and afterwards the qualification needs qualifying in its turn."

McKerrow, Greg maintains, is in line with the conservative tradition. Moreover, he was led to an over-simplification of procedure that could not take account of the essentially complex nature of the textual tradition. It should, however, be remembered that Greg might have slightly improved upon McKerrow's procedure; and that might be also a matter of opinion, but McKerrow's contributions to textual criticism will stand four-square to the winds of Time.

According to McKerrow, "the ideal text of the works of an early dramatist should be one which should approach as closely as the extant material allows to a fair copy, made by the author himself, of his plays in the form which he intended finally to give them, and on the negative side, should not in any way be coloured by the preconceived ideas or interpretations of later times." McKerrow was one of the foremost editors to realise that Shakespeare was concerned with the dramatic production of his plays, and he was not concerned with his plays to be read as closet dramas. The problem posed by an editor is to determine the most authoritative text, that was the nearest to what Shakespeare wrote.

McKerrow has divided the texts into two categories—monogenous and polygenous. The monogenous texts are those which derive from a single edition. The polygenous texts are those which derive from two or more extant editions, and they are eventually the substantive texts. The important texts, according to McKerrow, are (a) The early Quartos and the first Folio which alone can be of authority in the establishment of the text. (b) The later Folios and the early edited editions of Rowe, Pope,

Theobald, Johnson, Capell and Malone, in which the texts were freed from innumerable careless irregularities of transmission, and the emendations were effected from the commonsense point of view and (c) certain modern editions, beginning with the Cambridge edition of 1863-66, in which the fruits of research of the previous editors were reconsidered crystallised and incorporated.

W. W. Greg enunciated certain rules to be observed by a textual critic, which may be cited without any alteration. (a) The aim of a critical edition should be to present the text, so far as the available evidence permits, in the form in which we may suppose that it would have stood in a fair copy, made by the author himself, of the work as he finally intended it. (b) With this aim in view, an editor should select as the basis of his own edition (as, his copy-text) that is, the most 'authoritative' of the early prints, this being the one that on critical consideration appears likely to have departed least in wording, spelling, and punctuation from the author's manuscript. (c) In seeking to determine which is the most authoritative edition, an editor should distinguish between 'substantive' editions, namely, those not derived as to essential character from any other extant edition, and 'derivative' editions, namely those derived, whether immediately or not with or without minor intentional modification, from some other extant edition. It may be taken that the most authoritative edition will be a substantive one, but the distinction is in practice sometimes difficult to draw, so that this has less significance than at first appears. (d) The choice between substantive editions, in the event of there being more than one, is a matter for critical judgment of the general authority of the texts, based in the first instance upon a consideration of their probable relationship, character, and derivation. (e) Having selected his copy text an editor should reprint this exactly save for demonstrable errors, subject to necessary reservations in cases where there are alternative authorities no one of which can be assumed to be consistently more trustworthy than another; (f) An exception to the foregoing rule must be made in the event of a later derivative edition being shown to have been corrected or augmented by the author or from some authoritative source—short, that is, of such complete revision as would bring its derivative character in question. In the absence of external evidence it is not generally possible to ascertain how such correc-

tions and additions found their way into the text or to determine precisely the authority of the source from which they are derived, and the readings will therefore have to be treated mainly on their own merits, those only being admitted that can produce satisfactory credentials. On the other hand, should the evidence as a whole be such as to convince an editor of the presence in adequate number of corrections or additions actually made by the author, he will, while still following the copy text in matters of spelling, punctuation, and the like, introduce into it all the alterations of the revised edition, other than evident blunders and misprints, provided that there is no reason to suppose that any of them derive from a different and non-authoritative source ; and (g) should variants exist between different examples of the edition selected as copy-text, an editor must be guided in his choice not only by the intrinsic merits of each reading but by a consideration of the character and distribution of the variants as a whole. In certain cases he may have to take cognizance of variants in editions other than the copy text.

The rules cited above are all terse, yet self-explanatory, and there is no point in painting the lily by adding comments on the happily-worded rules. Greg has himself followed these rules scrupulously and has laid a strong and stable foundation of Shakespearian criticism.

We shall close this section by referring to the criticism of A. W. Pollard. In his *Shakespeare's Folio and Quartos*, Pollard acclaimed the first Folio of Shakespeare, edited by Heminge and Condell, which fulfilled the accepted requirements of every literary composition. He agrees that undoubtedly the errors in the Quartos have been repeated in the Folio. Yet Heminge and Condell never refer to the Quartos. In fact they have described them as "diverse and surreptitious copies." Sidney Lee had also singled out a few Quartos for special condemnation, as they were thought to have been pieced together from shorthand notes. He believed that most of the Quarto editions of Shakespeare's plays that were published in his lifetime were presumably printed from more or less imperfect and unauthorised play-house transcripts, obtained dishonestly. Shorthand writers were at work, or an actor might have been bribed for securing the manuscript copy of the play, or, it was quite possible that some people with remarkably good memory learnt by heart and reproduced the plays from memory for the fraudulent use of the



publishers. There was then no statutory prohibition, and publishers were at liberty to publish any manuscript, obtained by means, fair or foul. Pollard substantially agreed with Lee. He said that if the Quartos were so glibly described as pirated and surreptitious by Heminge and Condell, we are committed to the view that they condemned the Quartos and yet set up their texts from those very versions. According to Pollard, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV* (parts I and II), *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, and *Romeo and Juliet* are the good Quartos, which were entered in the stationer's Register. Before the publication of the first Folio, seventeen of the plays of Shakespeare were published in the Quartos. Of them *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* present us as many as nineteen texts. Five of these texts are bad and corrupt, a few have been set up from shorthand copies or from sheer memory. Fourteen good texts are there, but Shakespeare had no hand in the correction of the proofs.

The editor is faced with the problem of settling the foundations of Shakespeare's text. At the time of the publication of the first Folio in 1623, there were fortyfour editions of sixteen different single plays. Of them, there were eighteen first editions and twentysix reprints. The reprints of the plays differ from the first edition. In the intermediate editions, whenever a play was reprinted, new errors invariably crept in. These intermediate editions existed in 1623, when the first Folio was being published. Pollard made a thorough study of the different texts and came to certain conclusions that have in a sense laid the foundations of Shakespeare's texts.

Dover Wilson is also an eminent textual critic, and his conclusions are almost alike. He has written about the good and bad Quartos. Some minor actors wrote down what they could remember of the play, and subsequently they sold it to the dishonest publishers for a paltry amount. And these texts are bad Quartos. The good Quartos were printed from the prompt books for performances. Shakespeare wrote his plays in the white heat of imagination, and he had neither the time nor the intention to edit his texts as Ben Jonson did. It is quite likely that the prompter's notes and alterations were incorporated in the text. It may be just as likely that other contemporary dramatists added to what Shakespeare had written. The nineteenth century normally

stood for the first Folio as the most authoritative text. The twentieth century critics pointed out its glaring deficiencies, and proved that in certain cases the Quartos provided better and more authentic texts.

It may be noted that Pollard, Greg, McKerrow, Dover Wilson, Peter Alexander and Alice Walker have not said the last word on Shakespeare's texts. Percy Simpson, Helge Kokeritz, E. E. Willoughby and Edward Maunde have made distinct contributions to Shakespeare scholarship. In his *Printing and Proof-Reading of the First Folio of Shakespeare* ( 1963 ), Charlton Hinman has gone ahead of all his predecessors and conclusively proved that five compositors set up the text of the First Folio.

## *Theatrical or Dramatic Criticism*

The theatrical critics do not regard Shakespeare as a poet or philosopher. Shakespeare, they maintain, is essentially a playwright, and he wrote his plays for the stage. It is idle to speculate on Shakespeare's classical knowledge or his philosophy of life. But he knew the theatre of his day extremely well. And the theatrical critics are only concerned with Shakespeare as the man of the theatre. They like to study Shakespeare's stage, the conditions under which a play was produced, and the tastes of the audience which often determined the shape of the drama. In short, Shakespeare, the theatrical craftsman, engaged their serious attention. Henry Irving in a sense set the ball rolling. And the critics started their criticism with Irving as their target of attack. The fashion of producing Shakespeare's plays has changed tremendously in the twentieth century, and Irving must be credited with having effected the desired change. He presented Shakespeare in a grand style. His mantle fell on Herbert Beer-bohm Tree, whose productions of Shakespeare's plays were more colourful and grand. There are many grave objections to this type of spectacular production. "Because the plays," says Harrison, "have to be cut, altered and rearranged to allow the big scenes to be set. Moreover if our eyes are fully occupied with all the gorgeous details of costume or procession, our ears are distracted from the words." Irving and Tree lent charm and colour to their productions. But they did not present Shakespeare as he should have been presented.

A counterblast came from Harley Granville-Barker. A dramatist of distinction, Granville-Barker was a member of the dramatic school of the Theatre Royal. Subsequently he was attached to the Court Theatre. An able actor, he played some important roles of the Shakespearian dramas. On his retirement as actor, he was more attached to the stage as a producer-manager. Savoy Theatre became his new centre of activity, and thanks to his brilliant histrionic talent, a good number of Shakespearian plays were performed on the stage. "His productions..." says Halliday, "were revolutionary ; with the aid of a false proscenium,

proscenium doors, and built out apron stage without footlights he converted the picture-frame theatre into something like the Elizabethan ; then, to make time for the unabridged texts, scenery was formalised, there was only one interval, the pace of acting and speaking was quickened and traditional 'business' cut out." Granville-Barker's *Prefaces to Shakespeare* are a landmark in the history of theatrical criticism. What he had done on the stage was given a theoretical interpretation in his dramatic criticism.

In 1910-13 Granville-Barker started his revolutionary movement while producing Shakespearian plays, and particularly *Twelfth Night*. The interesting account of those productions given by G. B. Harrison deserves mention, and should be quoted at length :

"They were the most important productions for a hundred years, not only because they were beautiful in themselves, but because for the first time since the seventeenth century Shakespeare's plays were played just as they were written, and not cut and re-arranged to suit the scene-shifter. Without unduly horrifying his audiences, Granville-Barker evolved settings which allowed him to give the whole play entire and quickly. For *Twelfth Night* the main setting was a formal conventional garden with Noah's ark, trees and a central staircase branching out right and left, which needed little rearrangement. For the smaller scenes, the drinking scene for instance—he inserted a little tapestried room and not the usual baronial hall, which made the whole affair cosy and hearty. He suppressed all the traditional foolery, the candles-to-bed business of Toby and Andrew, and he produced the play as a whole, as a symphony. The result, astonishing at the time, was that *Twelfth Night* instead of being just a romp, became exquisitely beautiful and hauntingly sad.

In these productions Granville-Barker demonstrated what had hitherto hardly been realised, that Shakespeare did indeed know how to write plays. Everyone granted that he was a great poet who had provided a marvellous quiverful of quotations for public speakers, that he was a philosopher, and of course that he had quite a deep knowledge of human nature, but very few (and certainly not such critics as A. C. Bradley) realized the possibilities of his plays being superb stage dramas if only they could be produced as he wrote them to be played.

The Granville-Barker's *Twelfth Night* was a compromise between modern and Elizabethan. It combined the simplicity and rapid action of the Elizabethan with the lavishness of the modern ;



for it was magnificently costumed and lovely to the eyes. Since that time most producers have followed the main principle demonstrated by Granville-Barker. Whatever the setting, the play is acted as a whole, in its original pattern and with its full plot. The good producer begins by assuming that Shakespeare knew his business as a writer of good plays, and not merely of fine speeches, and therefore that the production must be a competent rendering of the score."

We have quoted long extracts from G. B. Harrison only to prove what revolutionary steps were being taken by Granville-Barker in the theatrical world. All his revolutionary ideas have been expressed in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*—in five series. Granville-Barker discussed his views also in "*From 'Henry V' to 'Hamlet'*," a British Academy Lecture, published in *Aspects of Shakespeare and Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. He was the first man to challenge Lamb's view that the plays of Shakespeare were less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever. Granville-Barker's arguments have been dwelt upon at length in our study of the trends of romantic criticism as well as the criticism of Bradley. Granville-Barker yielded to none in his admiration for both Lamb and Bradley. He was justified in his view that "Lamb was merely disgusted with the theatre of Kemble's day, and based his arguments on 'the stage of spectacle, not upon Shakespeare's.'" He utilised all the paraphernalia of modern stage-craft and produced the plays from the Elizabethan point of view. Granville-Barker had a thorough knowledge of the Elizabethan stage conventions. So had Stoll and Schücking. But their attitudes are fundamentally different. Granville-Barker's method is interpretative, while that of the realists is critical. Lamb suggested that the plays of Shakespeare should be closet-dramas, only to be read. Reading, he believed, would yield better results. For in that case the reader's imagination would not be circumscribed by the four-walls of the auditorium. Granville-Barker showed the fallacy and weakness of this line of argument and proved incontestably that the dramatic performances might easily bring to light many of the aspects of Shakespeare's dramatic art, which might elude the grasp of even a highly romantic and imaginative reader.

"Perhaps more than any other single writer," says T. S. Eliot, "Mr. H. Granville-Barker by his prefaces, illuminating the plays with the understanding of the producer, has suggested the need

for a synthesis of the several points of view from which Shakespeare can be studied." Himself an actor, producer, scholar, critic and man of the world, Granville-Barker had all the claims to write on Shakespeare. His prefaces, says G. B. Harrison, are the "finest examples of Shakespearian criticism which have been written since Samuel Johnson. An hour in his company taught one more of Shakespeare than a year's reading." These two remarks from two outstanding critics of the twentieth century will show the unique position of Granville-Barker. As a Shakespearian critic Granville-Barker is a chief exponent of the modern historical approach to Shakespeare, and in this regard he holds quite an important position like Stoll and Schücking steeped in Elizabethan lore. Granville-Barker knew thoroughly well the circumstances under which Shakespeare had to write his plays and the conditions in which the plays were staged. He discovered that *King Lear* was very successfully staged in the Elizabethan period, and its success might be equally spectacular in the twentieth century, only if it could be produced strictly according to the Elizabethan conventions. It is, in short, an honest attempt so revive the Elizabethan practice.

The production, however, is not a servile imitation or a mere carbon copy of that of the Elizabethan period. Granville-Barker knew the theatrical conditions of his own time thoroughly well. He knew the difference between the two ages. Yet he suggested almost as a challenge to the gaudy inanities of Irving and Tree, that *King Lear* might be acted on the bare stage as it was done in the Elizabethan period. No mechanical devices and costly and elaborate scenery were at all necessary.

Granville-Barker knew that the charm of Shakespeare's plays consisted in the witchery of his verse. In the modern stage, the scenery dazzles the eyes and captures the imagination. But on the Elizabethan stage the enchanting poetry of Shakespeare had a different appeal of its own. The audience had more sensitive ears and they feasted upon the subtleties and nuances of his verse. In fact, they were enraptured, feasted, fed. No scenery was at all necessary for kindling their imagination. The poetry almost like magic incantation kept the audience enthralled. The imagination thus stirred, created a new world of beauty and music. To Granville-Barker, play is the thing. To that end he studied Shakespeare in relation to the social, religious, political and economic background of the Elizabethan age. His

criticism is sympathetic and is based upon the historical knowledge and the knowledge of Shakespeare's stagecraft and has thus in a very large measure widened the scope of Shakespearian criticism.

## *Historical or Realistic Criticism*

Theatrical criticism is closely linked up with Historical or Realistic criticism. Theatrical critics under the leadership of Granville-Barker studied Shakespeare with reference to the Elizabethan stage conventions. The Historical critics are also steeped in Elizabethan lore. But they are, and the conclusion is irresistible, less romantic than the theatrical critics. Herford has spoken of two principal trends of Shakespearian criticism of the modern age—one is "practical sagacity," and the other is "imaginative intuition". Those who have pinned their faith in practical sagacity will be remarkably objective in their outlook. They will study bibliography, the printing houses of the Elizabethan age, the Elizabethan stage-conditions and the detailed history of that age. Those who believe in imaginative intuition, are least concerned with the Elizabethan conventions. They believe solely in individual perception and interpretation. They are, it is needless to say, subjective.

The historical or realistic critics are believers in practical sagacity. They refuse to appreciate Shakespeare at the ideal level of imagination. They are historical in the sense that they have minutely studied the history of the Elizabethan conventions. They are realistic in as much they are not imaginative or romantic in their approach. They do not look upon Shakespeare as a god, nor do they regard his plays as Gospel. Apotheosis of Shakespeare was in vogue among many of the romantic critics of England and Germany, and the worshipful note was considerably heightened by Victor Hugo. Even in the twentieth century the trailing clouds of worship are discernible. The realistic critics brought Shakespeare to human dimensions. J. M. Robertson is neither worshipful nor an iconoclast. He believes that Shakespeare's works have not reached us as they were written or staged. The works, therefore, should be studied afresh and all the additions and accretions should be expunged.

Stoll and Schücking completely broke with the romantic tradition; or it can just as well be said that they harked back



to the past and revived the good sense of the neo-classicists of the eighteenth century. Elmer Edgar Stoll, the American scholar has been called by Halliday one of the most trenchant of the realistic school of critics. Levin Ludwig Scoücking, the German scholar and historian worked along the same lines. Stoll and Schücking are, no doubt, the most remarkable figures among the realists. But there are many other critics besides, who studied the Elizabethan conventions with meticulous care. They may have been influenced by Stoll and Schücking, but sometimes it is yet matter of opinion. Kenneth Muir has mentioned some of them, and we shall do well to refer to them, however casually. They are—W. W. Lawrence, G. F. Reynolds, A. H. Thorndike, J. Q. Adams, Charles Sisson, A. C. Sprague, Alfred Harbage, G. P. Baker, Brander Matthews, Muriel Bradbrook and S. L. Bethell. Stoll and Schücking tower head and shoulders above them. Since 1907 Stoll has been writing a series of books, in all of which he challenged the cosy idealism of the romantic critics. His *Ghosts*, *Shylock*, *The Criminals*, *Falstaff*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Shakespeare Studies*, *Poets and Playwrights*, *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare* and *Shakespeare and other Masters* are so many landmarks in Shakespearian criticism. In all these works he, as Kenneth Muir points out, focused attention on Shakespeare's lack of realism.

With Stoll and Schücking, we have already said, the readers are on the plane of good sense. But with Bradley and the Bradleyites they are on the heights of metaphysics. Sometime one wonders if Stoll is challenging Bradley. Stoll does not subscribe to the current ideas about Shakespeare's heroes that they are profoundly philosophical. Nor does he believe that there is in their characters any psychological profundity. He sees in them, says Legouis only stage creations which follow a tradition, and are subjected to the artificial conditions of the theatre. Stoll concedes that Shakespeare can individualise his characters, yet they are but the figments of imagination. To look upon them as living men and women, as Bradley did, is futile. And hence his conclusions are worthy of consideration. In the first place, Shakespeare's aim is not psychological consistency, but dramatic effectiveness. Secondly, Shakespeare's mind was creative, archaic, and not critical, synthetic and not analytical.

Stoll has done his best to impress upon the readers a few

cardinal principles, which require analysis. Dramatic realism, he maintains, is not the realism of our work-a-day life. Poetic drama has its peculiar processes of effective operation. Stoll's criticism is, no doubt, a fresh and significant departure from the traditional pattern. Yet it must be said that he is pugnacious and combative. He is all the while defending a thesis, and, therefore, is tireless in attacking his antagonists. He is not at all objective and impartial. Thoroughly conversant with the theatrical conditions of the Elizabethan age as of his own, Stoll has read Greek, Roman, French, Spanish and Italian dramas of the Renaissance. The analogies he has suggested from time to time are a remarkable indication of his scholarly sweep. Yet it must be said that he is not always a torch-bearer or a Judge, he is at best an advocate. Some of his remarks are positively sickening. Francis Meres said many things complimentary about Shakespeare, and these remarks, in Stoll's opinion, are trite and cheap. His remark that Shakespeare was not superior to his contemporaries also has to be accepted with a grain of salt. That Shakespeare's contemporaries did not hold his dramas in esteem is debatable. We have to pause and reflect before we endorse his view that Shakespeare's dramas are all written to cater to the groundlings, and that they are idle songs of an empty day, and they do not convey any psychological truth or testify to any profound observation. It is also debatable whether Shakespeare's characters all belong to distinct categories—some are good, some are bad; some heroic and some grotesque. Shakespeare's characters are all highly complex and defy any such analysis and refuse to be reduced to a system, as has been so glibly suggested by Stoll.

Halliday is justified in thinking that Stoll is "the leader of the American and hardest-boiled of all the hard-boiled schools of Shakespeare criticism." True, the romantic critics have not taken the Elizabethan stage conventions into account. It is equally true that the characters were often determined by the conventions. But it is perhaps going too far to say that Shakespeare was a slave and victim to those conventions. Legouis in his admirable essay on the anti-romantic school of criticism agrees with Stoll that Shakespeare was a man of his times, but does not agree that he was incapable of raising himself above the mean level of his time. Shakespeare's genius was transcendent and he could, it must be said in all fairness, occasionally lift

himself out of the ruts of his age. It is right, says Legouis, to accuse romanticism of a frequent departure from Common Sense, but it can be said that Shakespeare cannot be measured with the sole foot-rule of Common Sense.

After all this is said, Stoll's remarks on Shakespeare's plays are still worth glancing at. His first work, it has already been pointed out, is on Shakespeare's treatment of ghosts and supernatural agencies. In Shakespeare's time ghosts were real and not the "abstractions of nineteenth century philosophy". The ghosts of the Elizabethan dramas had a definite purpose. They are introduced for wreaking vengeance, for prophecy or for craving burial or even as an omen of death. Ghosts in *Hamlet*, *Richard III*, *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth* are revenge-ghosts. It was going too far when the romantic critics looked upon the ghosts as embodiments of the conscience of the tragic heroes. Shakespeare's ghosts are all objective, and they are the embodiments of Nemesis. Shakespeare was a man of the Renaissance no doubt, but he shared with his contemporaries the ignorance and superstitious prejudice of his age. Shakespeare's spirit is not superior to the superstitions of his time. His ghosts are not decorative or literary. They grow out of native air and soil. They speak in the accents of Stratford. It is not wholly true to say that Shakespeare introduced ghosts and supernatural elements only with a view to pleasing the King and catering to the groundlings. He himself believed in these superstitions, and therefore his dramatic art was conditioned by the circumstances of his age.

Stoll in his study of the character of Shylock complains that Shylock, who was a laughing-stock in the Elizabethan period, is now, thanks to the zeal of the romantic critics, more sinned against than sinning. We now feel that he has been wronged, and he becomes almost a tragic figure. The realist Stoll wants to speak the truth about Shylock, who was invested with romance in the nineteenth century. He was, in fact, an odious villain, and the sentimental age had sentimentalised him. Shakespeare has punished Shylock severely. He has been forced to embrace Christianity. And Shakespeare's intention was not at all to be in favour of Shylock. Shakespeare never wished Shylock to be regarded as a pathetic figure. If he is, then it is the wishful thinking of the readers and the audience.

In his essay on the criminals of Shakespeare's plays, Stoll

says that Shakespeare has drawn their characters from the Elizabethan point of view. A criminal today is the victim of social forces, but in Shakespeare's time the conception was different. Conscience no doubt pricked them. But this conscience was not an emanation of their better self. It was, in fact, the voice of God that was something extraneous. They are never conscience-stricken.

Stoll's essay on Falstaff is a challenge to the sentimental view of Morgann, Bradley and other romantics. Falstaff, by no stretch of imagination, can be called a hero. He is a coward, whatever attempts might be made to rehabilitate him. His flight from Gadshill can never be explained away. The prince, Poins and Falstaff himself have dubbed him a coward. Then again, when cowardly Falstaff calls the heroic prince a coward, it is a perpetual stage situation. On the eve of the battle he says nervously, "I would 'twere bed-time, Hal, and all well," and nobody can dismiss it away. Sir John Oldcastle, the original of Falstaff, was himself a notorious coward. In his essay on *Hamlet*, Stoll again contests the romantic conception about his character. It is the nineteenth-century critics who bothered about the enigma of Hamlet's character. Before the nineteenth century Hamlet was regarded as a straightforward character. No psycho-analytical study of his character is at all necessary. In Shakespeare's time the delay and vacillation were a part of the Elizabethan dramatic convention. On a comparative study of *Hamlet* and other Elizabethan revenge plays Stoll concludes that delay and vacillation were a part of the convention of the age. Hamlet is not a dreamer, an idealist, prevented from revenge by his idle meditation. He is a man of action. He is not a falterer. The entire play is a series of incidents which testify to the agility, cleverness and ingenuity of Hamlet. Stoll in his essay on *Othello*, published in 1915 and in a chapter on *Othello*, that appeared in *Art and Artifice in Shakespeare* (1933) insists on the Aristotelian canon that the action of the play is far more important than the characters. The romantic and impressionist critics forget that *Othello* was written by a man of the Elizabethan age. They also forget that the Elizabethan audience were guided by conventions which are not in vogue today. Stoll in his analysis of *Othello* says twice that *Othello* is "little acquainted" with Iago; and it is a distortion of fact. He has failed to stress the structure of *Othello*. Some of the Elizabethan conventions that Stoll has



traced in *Othello* are nothing but inventions, as G. G. Sedgewick will call them. Stoll's knowledge of marital psychology is also open to grave objection.

Are we, then, to regard Stoll as a destructive critic? Far from it. Kenneth Muir in his essay on "Fifty years of Shakespearian criticism: 1900-50" says something interesting that deserves to be quoted at length:

Stoll tries to show that the attempts made by previous critics to demonstrate the consistency of Shakespeare's characters have only led them into absurdity; that Shakespeare is a great illusionist who conjures us temporarily into believing impossibilities, and that he obtains some of his greatest effects from the contrast between the hero and his actions—between the noble Macbeth and his career of crime, between the noble Othello and his jealous mania; that we ought to consider the dramas as Elizabethan plays, obeying certain conventions, and not waste our time in trying to reconcile manifest inconsistencies which would not be noted in the heat of performance. In so far as Stoll has repeatedly pointed out that poetic dramas obtain their effects by methods other than those of realism, we may be grateful to him for his forty-five years of campaigning. He provides a useful antidote to Archer's *The Old Drama and the New*, in which poetry was treated as an excrescence. Stoll allows that Shakespeare's characters 'more unmistakably than any one else's, are from the outset given voices, accents, of their own and not individual only, but beautiful, a fact which inveigles us, throughout the play, and even (witness the critics) afterwards, into accepting, not them only, but also incredible things that they not infrequently do.'

Stoll regards it as a sign of Shakespeare's greatness as a dramatic poet that he 'evades and hedges, he manoeuvres and manipulates, he suppresses or obscures'. There is some truth in this point of view; but to accept it wholly would be to shatter Shakespeare's reputation as the greatest of dramatists. Although we may agree with Bernard Shaw that "the score is more important than the libretto," great drama must in a very broad sense be true to life. We can have a staggering contrast between the doer and the deed provided that not only in the theatre but also in the study we are able to accept the play as an image of truth. In cold blood, particularly if we have tidy views about human nature, we may think it incredible that Macbeth should kill Duncan or Othello

smother his wife. But great poets have this in common with the cleverest gods : they

make them honours

Of men's impossibilities.

We accept, and not only in the heat of performance, that these events are true to human nature. Stoll found an opening for his attacks because of the nineteenth-century theories of psychology, and because of the 'realism' of late nineteenth-century drama. Without pretending that Shakespeare was confined by Elizabethan psychological theories, we may suggest that the Elizabethans and even eighteenth century critics had no difficulty in believing in the behaviour of Shakespeare's characters.

Detailed and lucid as the analysis of Kenneth Muir is, we suppose, we should discuss Stoll's criticism at greater length to remove any ambiguity that may still be left. It has often been noticed that the critics of Shakespeare have laid stress on three aspects—character, plot and language. The romantic critics have emphasised character ; the poetical and symbolic critics have laid stress on language, while the realists have given importance to the study of plot. Stoll has stressed the importance of plot like the neo-classicists. And that is why he has complained that Shakespeare cared only for the plot or the story element, and the result was extremely unhappy. Shakespeare in his story aimed at theatrical effect and sacrificed realism. Stoll also regrets that many subjective critics put their own ideas—philosophical, psychological or symbolical and made a mess of things. These critics have ignored all the Elizabethan conventions which actually determined Shakespeare's compositions.

We shall now discuss the contributions of Schücking and a few other realistic critics and make an appraisal of the realistic school of criticism. "With Levin L. Schücking", says Kenneth Muir, "we have the historical approach in its purest and simplest form. He is mainly concerned with the survival of primitive technique in Shakespeare's plays, and his criticism, unlike Stoll's, is entirely negative". Stoll and Schücking both agree that Shakespeare emphasised the importance of Plot. Schücking complains that the assessment of characters varies from reader to reader because of subjective approach. Romantic critics study Shakespeare in the light of modern thought and feeling, and not with reference to the Elizabethan conventions. Shakespeare's dramas were written for his age, and, therefore, the dramatist always kept the public

before his eyes. In Shakespeare's plays there are all sorts of anachronisms. Shakespeare always maintained contact with the masses, and hence the popular character of his dramatic art. In his art one notices the combination of the primitive element and the delicacy and subtlety while depicting the human soul.

In the Shakespearian dramas the actor was closer to his audience and expressed himself in monologues. Characters always have recourse to self-explanation. Hamlet is an introspective character, and it is only natural that he will speak to his inner self. But self-explanation on the part of Falstaff is unthinkable. The self-explanation of the Shakespearian characters, it may be noted, is direct. Lady Macbeth, Iago and Cloten directly revealed themselves. The villains often describe the heroes in glowing terms, and that is a sign of primitive art. In many of his plays Shakespeare expressed his own personality. He made the tragedies sententious only with a view to meeting the popular demand. He could not preserve the harmony of character and action. He often split up the dramatic action into many independent scenes. The comic scenes often disturb the unity of action. The lack of consistency is glaring in many Shakespearian characters. Cleopatra, for example, is a courtesan at the beginning. Familiar with the maids, she behaves like a shrew with the messenger. Antony felt drawn to her for her sensual appeal. But towards the end of the play the courtesan becomes a motherly woman, with her heart vibrant with selfless love. Plutarch's figure is thus completely changed. Shakespeare has raised her character to a higher level and has created untold difficulties.

Hamlet was made melancholy as it was the fashion of the age. Weakness and irritability are the traits of his character. Hieronimo of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* and Marston's Antonio are Hamlet's parallels. Hamlet is not over-delicate; for he is not afraid of bloodshed. The action of the drama is weak. A series of episodes were strung together. Shakespeare cared only for episodic intensification. Ophelia does not serve any dramatic purpose. There are many things in the play which do not promote action and give rise to expectations that are not fulfilled.

Schücking's remarks on *King Lear* are worth examining. Lear is a man of irascible temperament. Cordelia's bold and truthful replies provoke him, but there is no reason why he should hate his daughter. Lear has not always been used to flattery—a view that will be confirmed by the fool, Gloster and Kent. Romantic

critics have traced the course of regeneration and purification in his character. But Schücking holds that there is extinction but no purification. Lear does not develop ; he only breaks down.

Kenneth Muir's admirable comments on Schücking may be again quoted at length :

The mixture of tragedy and comedy often destroys the illusion ; that 'one might as well to-day interrupt the performance by reading the latest edition of the evening papers to the audience,' as insert the Porter's speech in *Macbeth* ; that the multitudinous scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra* exhibit a primitive technique and that such scenes as the blinding of Gloucester show that Shakespeare unwisely imitated atrocities from earlier dramas. Schücking believes that the Cleopatra with immortal longings is a totally different character from the strumpet of the early scenes ; that Lear in his madness does not acquire wisdom by the purgation of suffering—he merely conforms to the melancholic type ; and, indeed, that Shakespeare frequently sacrificed character to the demands of the plot. Characters frequently explain themselves to the audience in a way that is unnatural ; villains announce their villainy, whereas in real life they would either think of themselves as good fellows or else offer excuses for their conduct ; Miranda, a child of nature, talks self-consciously about her chastity ; and the device Shakespeare employs to emphasize Cordelia's goodness has the effect for the modern reader of making her sound complacent."

Schücking, as Kenneth Muir suggests, has slightly altered his position in his *The Meaning of Hamlet* and in the British Academy Lecture, where he has conceded that Shakespeare transformed the conventions he had inherited.

Besides Stoll and Schücking, there are several other critics who have all emphasised the popular character of the Shakespearean drama. Of them Creizenach, Robert Bridges, W. W. Lawrence, S. L. Bethell and M. C. Bradbrook deserve special mention. In their opinion, Shakespeare wrote for the popular stage which had an element of anonymity. The Elizabethan audience was interested in the plays, but not in the playwright. Shakespeare, they maintain, retained the primitive crudities. Robert Bridges in his 'Influence of the audience on Shakespeare's drama' has categorically pointed out that Shakespeare wanted to purchase the applause of the crowd. All the silly quibbles and word-play were introduced only to capture popular imagination.



Placing on record his sincere admiration for Shakespeare as a dramatic artist, Bridges regrets that he has consciously admitted the degrading elements in the plays.

Lawrence in his *Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* emphasises the fact that Shakespeare treated traditional themes in his plays in a traditional manner. Nowhere has Shakespeare violated the traditional morality of the Elizabethan age. The bed trick of Helena and Mariana was a part of the medieval tradition.

S. L. Bethell in his *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition* follows in the footsteps of Stoll and Schücking. Shakespeare, Bethell maintains, was a product of his age, and wrote with reference to the Elizabethan conventions. What he is particularly remembered for, is his analysis of the psychology of the Elizabethan audience. "He argues," says Kenneth Muir, "that an audience possesses multi-consciousness, so that it can react to a speech or scene in several different ways at once, and so that a dramatist can fluctuate easily between conventionalism and naturalism."

M. C. Bradbrook has been profoundly influenced by Stoll and Schücking. In her opinion, the historic approach is the correct approach. In her *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* she has salvaged the past, and related Shakespeare and his contemporaries to his age. In her *Elizabethan stage conditions*, she has, as Kenneth Muir says, "tried to cover too much ground, but she adapted Stoll for her own purposes and extracted the truth that lies imbedded in Schücking's too rigid formulations."

We have said enough of Stoll and Schücking, but we should, we suppose, bring into focus certain specific things that have been done by them. Stoll condemns the psychological rendering of Shakespeare's plays; he has related Shakespeare to his age and the existing Elizabethan conventions; his characters are notable, and they are contrasted with their vicious action; Shakespeare always cared for popularity, and he studied the psychology of his audience with care and sympathy; there are innumerable inconsistencies in his plays which, when staged, escape notice; but when read, the defects are glaring.

Schücking emphasises direct self-expression of the characters which was an old convention; Shakespeare's audience was unsophisticated, and hence the playwright always conformed to the popular tradition and conventions; Shakespeare had recourse to episodic intensification. What appears contradictory and almost revolting while reading appears perfectly consistent on

the stage; Shakespeare's dramas are but the revival of the primitive patterns. Shakespeare's audience, according to Robert Bridges, were the masters and Shakespeare was but their servant; Shakespeare was compelled to cater to them. Schücking, on the other hand, believes that there was no compulsion; it was Shakespeare's choice to concede to the popular demand; Schücking explains that the direct self-explanation of the characters in so many soliloquies corresponds to the chorus of the primitive times; it is not worth while, according to Schücking, to search for psychological naturalism in Shakespeare's characters, for the characters behave according to conventions.

Recent investigations have invalidated some of the conclusions of Stoll and Schücking. The critics who have worked along these lines have thrown more light on the Elizabethan audience. They stoutly maintain that the audience were appreciative and attentive; they were not boisterous elements; and they were sensitive enough to enjoy the magic incantation of Shakespeare's poetry. That fact, itself, is a vindication of Shakespeare as a supreme artist. The historical critics deserve praise for what they have done. They have related Shakespeare to his age, and that is a critical achievement. They have tried to present Shakespeare in correct perspective. They have also saved Shakespeare from the spate of adulation. But they have failed to make a correct appraisal of Shakespeare's originality and his supremacy as an artist. If Shakespeare was influenced by the Elizabethan conventions and the unsophisticated audience, so were his contemporaries. But today Shakespeare is considered to be the greatest poet and dramatist of the world, whereas many of the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries have become bibliographical treasures, ransacked by the antiquarians. The tools and conventions were turned into supreme works of art by the transcendent genius of the artist.

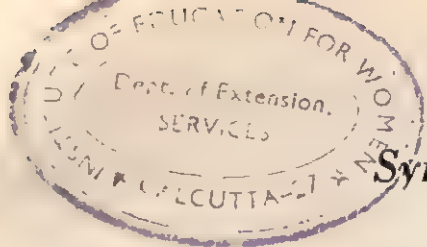
J. I. M. Stewart supports Bradley in his *Character and Motive in Shakespeare* against the attacks of the realistic critics. Bradley, Stewart maintains, took the characters of Shakespeare as living men and women, only because he took them seriously. Bradley's study was psychological, and psychological study was not to be dismissed summarily. Bradley's method is sound in essence, though it could be improved by some of the findings of the realists. Stewart is more an assailant of Stoll and Schücking than a defender of Bradley. He has studied Shakespeare with

the help of psycho-analysis and anthropology. Stoll and Schücking have often taxed Shakespeare with inconsistencies, which, in the opinion of Stewart, can be psychologically explained away. Shakespeare, he is convinced, had a wonderful insight into the obscurer regions of man's being. "In no poetic drama," Stewart says convincingly, "substantial human truth may be conveyed by means other than those of an entire psychological realism." Kenneth Muir's remarks on Stewart deserve to be quoted at length :

Stewart's book has at times a Johnsonian common sense, at other times a practised ingenuity which sets the reader on his guard. His researches into morbid psychology are likely to lead to a counter-attack by a Stoll ; but it is only fair to say that he does not pretend to diagnose Shakespeare's characters ; he merely used textbook figures as a warning against the assumption that apparent inconsistency is untrue to life.

Thanks to the intensive researches of Freud, Adler and Jung, there have been psychological studies of Shakespeare. Even as early as 1910 Dr. Ernest Jones in his *The Oedipus-Complex as an Explanation of Hamlet's Theory* revealed the shocking truth that Hamlet himself was in love with his mother, and his delay to avenge the death of his father was due to his own sense of guilt. Dr. Ernest Jones was too hasty in his conclusions. "In the light of modern knowledge," says Halliday, "this is an attractively simple explanation, though it is difficult to square with all the facts, and it seems unlikely to have been Shakespeare's."

William White in his *Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare* applied the knowledge of the unconscious mind. Ella F. Sharpe in her recent work, *A Psycho-Analytic View of Shakespeare* has done some excellent work. Hardin Craig in his *The Enchanted Glass : The Elizabethan Mind in Literature*, studied Shakespeare psychologically. We only regret that no psychologist has tried to study the subconscious mind of Shakespeare with as much meticulous care as has been done by J. L. Lowes who has studied Coleridge in his *Road to Xanadu*. It might be one of the reasons why Bertrand Russell has wittily attacked the psycho-analytical study of Shakespeare in one of his fanciful stories.



## Symbolical Criticism

Symbolical criticism or criticism based on the study of Shakespeare's imageries is not any thing new. William White, a critic of the eighteenth century, should be regarded as the pioneer in this field. For White in his *A Specimen of a Commentary* made an intensive study of symbols and images, and his ideas were mostly derived from Locke's doctrine of the association of ideas. Coleridge had something to say about images, but Coleridge was fragmentary in his criticism. Dowden referred to the iterative imagery of blood in *Macbeth*. Bradley in his study of *King Lear* noticed animal imageries, which intensified the bestial atmosphere of the play. That is what the Victorians had done.

In the twentieth century, critics began to study Freud's psycho-analysis ; and imageries began to be studied more systematically. Kenneth Muir has referred to some of them, and we shall do well to mention them. E. E. Kellett has studied imageries lying behind the puns. George Rylands has gone one step ahead. Una Ellis-Fermor, a very competent critic of today, has published *Some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery*, and rehabilitated some critics, who had done excellent work in the field, and yet remained shrouded in obscurity. They are T. Hilding Svartengren, Henry W. Wells, Stephen J. Brown and Elizabeth Holmes.

In the twentieth century many critics have confined themselves solely to the study of imageries, and that is why they may be credited with having inaugurated a school that is monolithic. For imagery to them is the keystone. Now that school itself has branched off into many directions. I. A. Richards, G. Wilson Knight and Empson have their following and every month new critics are contributing to the pile.

While tracing the tendencies of the twentieth century Shakespearean criticism, we said that the criticism of the age was objective. But while studying the works of the critics of imageries, it is necessary to qualify the statement. Symbolical criticism is mainly subjective. One critic reads one sort of significance in one imagery, and another critic reads another. But the subjectivity varies in degree. Caroline Spurgeon, for example, has done



elaborate card-indexing of the imageries, and she is, therefore, not very subjective. Wilson Knight, on the other hand, has been more interpretative and, is, therefore, more subjective.

Symbolical critics, unlike the realists, are never concerned with the sources or the history of the Elizabethan conventions. Plot, which is the soul of tragedy according to Aristotle, does not interest them in the least. Character also is not their supreme concern. Language is what they are vitally interested in; and the other aspects of drama are detached. These critics find the significance of the Shakespearian dramas in certain symbols, images, words and metaphors that lie below the plot and the character. But they have not completely detached character. G. Wilson Knight and L. C. Knights, for example, are two symbolical critics and they have both declared that they are not anti-Bradleyite. They have not completely eliminated character, and willynilly they are indebted to Bradley, who had subordinated every other aspect of drama to character.

The symbolical critics regard Shakespeare primarily as a poet. Shakespeare's dramas are to them so many poetic patterns; and words, images, metaphors and symbols have wholly contributed to those patterns. The symbolical critics do not believe in "practical sagacity" but in "imaginative intuition".

Caroline Spurgeon and G. Wilson Knight are the two most mentionable names in this connection. Yet both of them are poles apart. Spurgeon's method is objective and scientific, while Knight's method is subjective and analytical. Spurgeon has counted, with meticulous care, the symbolic imageries in each of the plays and classified them. These imageries, she believes, have heightened the atmosphere of the play and provided a suitable background to it. In each play, however, there is a dominant image that is almost like the refrain of the play. In *Hamlet*, for example, the imagery of disease is remarkably prominent. That actually symbolises the unhappy state of affairs in Denmark and rottenness at the very core of the society.

In her British Academy Lecture, delivered in 1931, Caroline Spurgeon, tried to study "Shakespeare's Iterative Imagery," as undersong and touchstone in his work. "Iterative imagery," she has said, "that is, the repetition of an idea or picture in the images used in any one play, is a marked characteristic of Shakespeare's art; indeed, it is, I think, his most individual way of expressing his imaginative vision." Shakespeare had some picture or symbol,

repeatedly recurring in the form of images. The British Academy Lecture was preceded by an earlier Paper—"Leading Motives in the Imagery of Shakespeare's Tragedies." All these embryonic thoughts were later stated in an organised form in her *Shakespeare's Imagery and what it tells us*.

By way of explaining the term 'image', she says that it is "the only available word to cover every kind of simile, as well as every kind of what is compressed simile—metaphor. I suggest that we divest our minds of the hint the term carries with it of visual image only, and think of it, for the present purpose, as connoting any and every imaginative picture or other experience, drawn in every kind of way, which may have come to the poet, not only through any of his senses, but through his mind and emotions as well, and which he uses, in the forms of simile and metaphor in their widest sense, for purposes of analogy." "The image thus gives quality, creates atmosphere and conveys emotion in a way no precise description, however clear and accurate, can possibly do."

The poet's imagery is a startling revelation of his own idiosyncrasies. Spurgeon has studied the imageries used by Bacon, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Chapman, Dekker and Massinger and traced in their plays the idiosyncrasies of those writers. Against that background Spurgeon has studied in details Shakespeare's imageries. She has traced the majority of Shakespeare's similes and metaphors drawn from the simplest everyday things seen and observed. There are images drawn from nature, and those drawn from indoor life. "Nature—the life of the English country-side, the weather and its changes, the seasons, the sky, sunrise and dawn, the clouds, rain and wind, sunshine and shadow, the garden, flowers, trees, growth and decay, pruning and grafting, manuring and weeding, the sea and ships, the river and its banks, weeds and grasses, pools and water, animals, birds and insects, sports and games, especially snaring birds, hunting and hawking; these are the things which chiefly occupy him and remain in his mind."

"Daily indoor life comes next, especially the simple indoor occupations and routine, the eating, drinking and cooking, the work of the kitchen, washing, wiping, dust, diet, rust and stains, the body and its movements, sleep and dreams, clothes and material, patching and mending, common handicrafts, the feel of substances, smooth or soft or sticky, fire, candles and lamps;

sickness and medicine, parents and children, birth, death and marriage."

Besides these, there are imageries drawn from the types of men and couriers, beggars and thieves, soldiers and servants. There are also many imageries which are imaginative and fanciful. The images drawn from the gardener's point of view loom large. The weather and its changes are substantially drawn upon. The delicate changes of light have never escaped Shakespeare's sensitive eyes. His love of movement is also remarkable.

Shakespeare had a wonderful sight, which was at once quick and penetrating. He had a marvellous colour sense. The changes and contrasts in colour were his delight. He had also a very great interest in the human face. But all his imageries are not iterative ; they do not occur again and again, but some do. For example, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the dominating image is light ; and in *Hamlet*, as has already been pointed out, the dominant image is disease which is infecting and destroying the body.

Besides these imageries, there are some symbolic imageries in Shakespeare in almost every one of his plays, which have heightened their meaning. In the history plays the symbolical imageries are of an elementary nature. In the comedies such imageries often contribute to the background. In the Dramatic Romances the symbolic imageries have become infinitely subtle.

Let us now point out very briefly the symbolical imageries in different plays, referred to by Spurgeon. In *Richard III*, the garden images loom large ; in *Richard II*, the garden images are more prominent still. The verbs "plant", "pluck", "crop", and "wither" occur almost as a refrain ; In *Henry VI* the garden images are there, but along with them the images of contrasted light flit fitfully before our vision. The comets, sun, planets and stars against the lurid background of black and mourning deserve to be specially noted. Besides the imageries of the heavenly bodies, there are in *Henry VI* the images of the butcher and the slaughter house ; the animal imageries in the play are too prominent to be missed ; in *Henry V* there are imageries relating to the swift and soaring movement ; in *King John* the imageries are about the body and bodily action.

The country pictures largely figure in *A Mid Summer Night's Dream* ; the woodland beauty of the dreaming summer night forms the romantic background of the play. The moonlit background provides its enchanted and dreaming quality ; the moon seems to

be almost living figure. In *Two Gentlemen of Verona* the imageries are mostly related to the types and classes of people; in *Twelfth Night* the imageries are, in the main, topical; in the *Merchant of Venice* the imageries are mostly musical; *Love's Labour's Lost* has an abundance of nature and animal images, but the dominant images are related to encounters; in *Much Ado About Nothing* Shakespeare has emphasised the same theme, for there the war of wits in love can never escape one's notice; in *As You Like It* the images are more or less topical; but there is a preponderance of country similes as well; in *Cymbeline* tree, bird and money images are remarkable; the *Tempest*, which is a wonderful symphony of sound, has naturally sound for its dominant image; in the *Winter's Tale* the great natural movements—the ebb and flow figure quite prominently.

As regards tragedies, the symbolical imageries in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* have already been referred to. In *Troilus and Cressida* the imageries are all woven about sensitive palate of delectable food and wine; the ill-fitting garments sit ill upon *Macbeth*, and they are the warf and woof of the imageries of the play; but the imageries about evil and darkness also cannot be missed; in *Othello* the main image is that of animals in action, along with which the sea imageries deserve notice; in *King Lear* the dominating image is about a human body in anguished movement; and *Antony and Cleopatra* is teeming with world images.

Caroline Spurgeon is not very much concerned with Shakespeare's use of poetry and imagery, and yet she has analysed the beauty of individual images. The individual words of the text have been intensely studied. She has not been completely blind to the poetical effect of words and their power of evocation. She has in her own way concentrated on the poetry of Shakespeare. In a systematic way she has studied each of the plays of Shakespeare and traced the dominating and floating images in them. Her statements, it must be said in all fairness to her, are never general abstractions. The images, she maintains, can let us have an access into the working of Shakespeare's mind and creative faculty. She has convincingly proved that each play of Shakespeare is a unified whole, for the images form a sort of cluster and reflect the thought-currents of the poet. She has considered the words in isolation and not in their totality. John Middleton Murry in one of his essays says, "Recognition of spiritual quality can be



most forcefully and swiftly conveyed through analogous recognitions of sensuous quality." Spurgeon, unlike Middleton Murry, has never bothered about the spiritual and sensuous qualities of the poetry. She has, no doubt, done a lot of cataloguing and card-indexing, but the poetical power of the symbolical imageries did not capture her imagination.

G. Wilson Knight, about whom we shall have to say much later, may be contrasted with Caroline Spurgeon. Both of them have concentrated upon Shakespeare's poetry, imagery and metaphor. Spurgeon has ignored the other aspects of Shakespeare, viz. characterisation, stage-craft and plot; G. Wilson Knight has emphasised plot and character as well as the symbolic overtone and poetical atmosphere. Knight himself says: "These investigations can be considered to lie directly in tradition of A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* which is too often wrongly supposed to have been limited to the *minutiae* of 'characterisation'." Spurgeon has no faith in the dictum—Play is the thing. She traces in an image or symbol the entire atmosphere of the play. In other respects also they differ fundamentally. Wilson Knight's method is one of imaginative interpretation, while Spurgeon is not worried at all about interpretation. Wilson Knight never resorts to cataloguing or indexing. He has tried to find out a poetic atmosphere in each play, and that atmosphere is the dominant theme. Spurgeon has found, for example, the ill-fitting garments as the dominant imagery in *Macbeth*; G. Wilson Knight finds an atmosphere of evil pervading the play. If Spurgeon finds everything in words and images, Wilson Knight finds it in the atmosphere. He has the power of deep penetration into the very heart of the play. He has almost an instinctive vision and a profound insight, which we do not find in Caroline Spurgeon at all. Wilson Knight has admirably discovered the characters of Shakespeare's plays to be but the symbols of certain ideas. Othello, for example, is the symbol of "purpose, courage and valour"; Iago symbolises "unlimited, formless villainy," Desdemona stands for the supreme value of love. Here one feels tempted to suggest that Wilson Knight has shifted from the dryas dust planes of reality of Spurgeon to a world of vision and imagination, in which the characters stand for certain supreme values. Wilson Knight is a wonderful connoisseur of poetry, and Spurgeon is not very sensitive to the subtleties and nuances of poetry. In most of his books on Shakespeare, Wilson Knight has feasted upon the

rich fare of poetry and communicated his joy in a language that is no less poetical. Spurgeon has cared only for words, and often words in isolation. She is more interested in the components rather than in the whole. When Wilson Knight says, for example, "[Othello] holds a rich music all its own and possesses a unique solidity and procession of picturesque phrase or image, a peculiar chastity and serenity of thought," the readers are transported to the dreamland of poetical appreciation. Spurgeon has taken us to the solid world of card-indexing, dry analysis and tabulation of the imageries of Shakespeare. Wilson Knight has depth and vision, which are lamentably lacking in Spurgeon. Spurgeon again has little to do with characterisation. Wilson Knight does, no doubt, trace a symbol in each play, but characterisation is also a part of his criticism. He thus remains a symbolical critic who incidentally deals with the other aspects of dramatic criticism also. He has far greater width, depth and variety than perhaps all his contemporaries.

Caroline Spurgeon's predecessors in the field have often been subjective; Spurgeon has become objective and scientific almost with a vengeance. Her methods were to trace in the images of a poet "the channels of his thought, the qualities of things, the objects and incidents he observes and remembers, and perhaps most significant of all those, which he does not observe and remember." Rosemond Tuve in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* has challenged the methods adopted by Spurgeon. Kenneth Muir, who is also a little critical about Spurgeon's method and conclusions, says: "These iterative images can be used to reveal what was Shakespeare's conception, conscious or unconscious, of his own plays, though there is plenty of room for disagreement about the actual interpretation of the images so tabulated." Kenneth Muir says again: "Spurgeon was apt to over-simplify the plays. Not unless the imagery is studied in relation to other factors—plot, character, symbolism, iteration of words—are we likely to reach a satisfactory conception of a play."

G. B. Harrison, in his admirable book *Introducing Shakespeare*, clinches the issue, and all sensible readers will subscribe to his views.

"The values and limitations of this kind of study [of Spurgeon] lie in its being mechanical; and absolutely mechanical scientific collection of statistics of this kind reveals many of the processes of the human mind which would escape notice altogether in

ordinary reading. It can not be carried too far, for a poetic image is not a simple or mechanical expression, but, especially in Shakespeare's later period, a fusion of all kinds of sparkling ideas...Nevertheless, within reason, a study of imagery will give results similar to chemical analysis. The water of a well, when analysed, will show so much of this, so much of that, and perhaps a minute trace of zinc. The analysis is entirely objective; it is not the business of the chemist to say how zinc should be present in the water. The history of the well will show that, some six months before, a bucket had accidentally been dropped in it. A study of Shakespeare's Imagery will show many of his experiences, but not how and when he came by them... Once, having a private theory of my own, based on the fact that Shakespeare's images drawn from the sea and war indicated that at some time or other he had seen war and the sea at first hand, I put it to two authorities on Shakespearian imagery. I asked each of them the same question: "Do you, from your intensive study of Shakespeare's imagery, gather that he had personal experience of the sea?" The one replied, 'Of course'; and the other, 'Certainly not'.

"From this one can deduce that, just as a poetic image comes from a poet's experience, which includes the books that he has read, so also the perception of an image and of its significance by readers or hearers comes from their experience. Unless the critic has known the same kind of experiences as the author he will miss many images and their significance." After all this has been said, we shall do well to remember what M. C. Bradbrook has said about Spurgeon: "Many criticisms have been levelled at Miss Spurgeon's book as being too tabulated, too close to the Card Index, and for the way in which poetry is used as an aid to build a picture of Shakespeare, the man.... yet *Shakespeare's Imagery* remains, as a first survey, indispensable to the students of the subject."

Wolfgang H. Clemen has published in German his *Shakespeare's Bilder* which was later revised and translated into English. His work is a distinct improvement upon Spurgeon's. While introducing Clemen's work to the English-speaking readers, Dover Wilson says:

"I felt, too, that her [Spurgeon's] statistical method, correct and, indeed, essential enquiry, was ill-suited, if not at times definitely misleading, when applied to a work of art, useful to

some extent as her collections might be as demonstrating what images frequently occurred in any given play. Still less was I persuaded by her attempt to deduce Shakespeare's personal propensities from these collections : I even remained unconvinced that he detested dogs.... Whereas her method is statistical, his is organic ; her aim is to throw light upon the mind of Shakespeare the man, his is to elucidate the art of Shakespeare, the poet-dramatist. Thus while she is mainly concerned with the images of the canon as a whole, classified according to their content with a view to discovering the writer's views, interests and tastes, he concentrates upon the forms and significance of particular images or groups of images in their context of the passages, speech or play in which they occur."

G. Wilson Knight is a symbolic critic in the truest sense of the term, about whom we said something in the preceding pages. He was, at the initial stage at least, influenced by Colin Still, John Middleton Murry and T. S. Eliot. Still's point of view was allegorical, for he had interpreted *The Tempest* in allegorical terms. Middleton Murry's essay on "Metaphor" must also have influenced Wilson Knight. His first work *The Wheel of Fire* was introduced by T. S. Eliot, in which Wilson Knight stated his purpose. T. S. Eliot, while introducing Knight observes : "I believe that there is a good deal in the interpretation of Shakespeare by Mr. Wilson Knight, which can stand indefinitely for other people ; and it would be a waste of time for me to pronounce judicially on the two elements in Mr. Knight's work.... But I confess that reading his essays seems to me to have enlarged my understanding of the Shakespeare pattern ; which, after all, is quite the main thing. It happened, fortunately for myself, that when I read some of his papers I was mulling over some of the later plays, particularly *Pericles*, *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale* ; and reading the later plays for the first time in my life as a separate group, I was impressed by what seemed to me important and very serious recurrences of mood and theme.... I think that Mr. Wilson Knight has shown insight in pursuing his search for the pattern below the level of 'plot' and 'character.'.... I think that Mr. Knight, among other things, has insisted upon the right way to interpret a Poetic drama.... Our first duty as either critics or 'interpreters', surely, must be to try to grasp the whole design, and read Character and Plot in the understanding of this sub-terrene or submarine music. Here I say Mr. Knight has



pursued the right line for his own plane of investigation, not hypostasizing 'character' and 'plot'." He is not an iconoclast as some take him for. He wanted to apply to "Shakespeare's work in general the methods applied by Bradley to certain outstanding plays." Yet he is not a Bradleyite in the sense Charlton is. He cares more for the symbolic overtone and atmosphere than character, although character has not been completely ruled out.

Knight's remarks on his own method of interpretation deserve mention: "At the start, I would draw a distinction between the terms 'criticism' and 'interpretation'. It will be as well to define, purely for my immediate purpose, my personal uses of the words. 'Criticism' to me suggests a certain process of deliberately objectifying the work under consideration; the comparison of it with other similar works in order especially to show in what respects it surpasses, or falls short of, those works; the dividing its 'good' from its 'bad'; and, finally, a formal judgement as to its lasting validity. 'Interpretation', on the contrary, tends to merge into the work it analyses; it attempts, as far as possible, to understand its subject in the light of its own nature, employing external reference, if at all, only as a preliminary to understanding; it avoids discussion of merits, and, since its existence depends entirely on its original acceptance of the validity of the poetic unit which it claims, in some measure, to translate into discursive reasoning, it can recognize no division of 'good' from 'bad'. Thus criticism is active and looks ahead, often treating past work as material on which to base future standards and canons of art; interpretation is passive, and looks back, regarding only the imperative challenge of a poetic vision. Criticism is a judgment of vision; interpretation a reconstruction of vision. In practice, it is probable that neither can exist, or at least has yet on any comprehensive scale existed, quite divorced from the other. The greater part of poetic commentary pursues a middle course between criticism and interpretation. But sometimes work is created of so resplendent a quality, so massive a solidity of imagination that adverse criticism beats against it idly as the wind that flings its ineffectual force against a mountain-rock. Any profitable commentary on such work must necessarily tend towards a pure interpretation. The work of Shakespeare is of this transcendent order. Though much has already been written on it, only that profitably survives which in its total effect tends to interpretation rather than criticism." The three principles of interpretation

suggested by Wilson Knight may be reproduced in his own words—Readers should “regard each play as a visionary unit bound to obey none but its own self-imposed laws”; they should “relate any given incident or speech either to the time sequence of story or the peculiar atmosphere, intellectual or imaginative, which binds the play”; and “we should analyse the use and meaning of direct poetic symbolism.”

Kenneth Muir has drawn a distinction between Wilson Knight's method and his particular applications of the method.

“Some have doubted whether the Elizabethans, and even Shakespeare himself, would have understood these.... principles; but even if this could be proved Knight would argue that it did not follow that the analysis of poetic symbolism was an illegitimate method of interpretation, for a poetic conception might be unconsciously expressed in terms of symbols. Knight at least demonstrated that Shakespeare, whether consciously or unconsciously, used tempests and music as symbols of discord, hatred and love.

“Perhaps the strongest argument for the validity of Knight's methods is the fact that he has genuinely increased our understanding of certain plays which had baffled critics who had approached them by earlier methods.... He has done more than anyone else to justify the methods employed by Shakespeare in the plays of the final period, and the ‘transcendental humanism’ he discovers in *Antony and Cleopatra* would seem to be closer to Shakespeare's conception than ‘the world ill lost’ of Henry Morley and Quiller-couch. Perhaps the best example of Knight's method in *The Wheel of Fire* is the essay on *Measure for Measure*. It has been treated as a cynical and unpleasant play; the happy ending has been regarded as an example of the way Shakespeare the popular playwright made concessions to the groundlings; the Duke has been blamed for his irresponsible conduct; and the pardoning of Angelo has been variously lamented. Knight by interpreting the play by means of the gospels and by treating it as a dramatic parable has, though he was unwillingly following in the footsteps of Pater, immeasurably increased our understanding of it.”

So very eulogistic about Wilson Knight, Kenneth Muir has not lost his critical conscience. Wilson Knight's “originality,” he complains, “sometimes turns to eccentricity; he is not alive to aesthetic values and one has the feeling that he might praise

a minor poet above his deserts if only he manipulated symbols with reasonable competence ; he claims the right to find meanings in the plays which could hardly have occurred to the poet.”

Kenneth Muir has admirably assessed the contributions of Knight. Even at the peril of reiteration certain other points need to be emphasised. We have already referred to Knight's indebtedness to T. S. Eliot. C. J. Sisson says that “Mr. Knight develops the new approach to imagery, encouraged by Eliot's own notions of the relations of poetry and criticism. Poetry, Eliot argues, compels interpretation as the Universe compels interpretation by metaphysics. And the meaning of poetry to others than the writer, with certain limitations, is as much a part of that poetry as what it means to the writer.”

Sisson's remark needs analysis. Shakespeare, in the opinion of Wilson Knight, is essentially a poet. He has started with Eliot's contention that poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. “The poet has not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.” G. Wilson Knight and his camp followers, and he has many, try to find out the “impressions and experiences” in images and symbols. Eliot does not use the word ‘symbol’, but ‘Objective correlative’. We are, however, tempted to ask if Wilson Knight could be so impersonal and objective as T. S. Eliot. He has traced symbols and sought to read meanings into them, but his imaginative interpretation has been eminently subjective. M. C. Bradbrook's comments on Wilson Knight deserve mention. “Wilson Knight saw the plays as constituting a singly vast design, held together by certain symbols. Imagery, action and character are all parts of the design. His writing had therefore a unity, and a fiery quality which stimulated readers to enthusiasm or to violent disagreement. For Knight each play embodied a vision of the mystery of things : Shakespeare was in the exact sense a metaphysical poet, whose last plays were the consummation of all his art. With this impassioned conviction Knight essayed a close scrutiny of the text ; he traced imagery from great central statements like the soliloquies of Hamlet and Macbeth down to evanescent hints in the speech of minor characters. His influence has been far-reaching : it is behind much of the work of the so-called ‘Cambridge School’ and much modern American criticism. Few will go all the way

with Knight; but in his elucidation of the problem plays and the final romances, he decisively changed the course of critical thought."

Wilson Knight looks upon a play as an "expanded metaphor". He wants to analyse the use and meaning of direct poetic symbolism. He believes that even a thorough acquaintance with the Elizabethan stage conventions will not render up the secret. "Nor will sound knowledge of the stage and the especial theatrical technique of Shakespeare's work render up its imaginative secret." Then, what is the way out? Wilson Knight suggests that "a true philosophic and imaginative interpretation which will aim at cutting below the surface to reveal that burning core of mental or spiritual reality from which each play derives its nature and meaning."

G. Wilson Knight has immensely enriched Shakespearian criticism. Yet we feel at times that his interpretation is apocalyptic. Bradleyism has had its day; Stoll and Schücking strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage, Wilson Knight is the rage of the day. Yet the criticism of each, when weighed in the balance, seems wanting. True, the critics of the twentieth century have done splendid work, yet their work has been piecemeal, and the totality of the play has often escaped their notice. Shakespeare was a playwright. He presented men and women on the stage. Poetry was their medium of expression. He created "organic forms", but the modern critics have a tendency to dissect and analyse the organic forms of Shakespeare.

L. C. Knights, about whom we said much, in our study of Bradley, is a follower of Wilson Knight. "He is less prolific, less original, and more critical," says Kenneth Muir. His parody of Bradley is too well-known to be referred to. His criticism of *Macbeth* bears G. Wilson Knight's influence. His essay on *Hamlet* is almost shocking. Hamlet, Knights thinks, is neurotic and immature and is afraid of being an adult. "This essay," says Kenneth Muir, "is a useful corrective to the sentimentalists, but it seems rather to ignore the unlucky situation in which Hamlet found himself—one which might well make cowards of us all."

L. C. Knights regards the plays of Shakespeare to be poetry, and in this regard he belongs to the school of G. Wilson Knight. A play, he maintains stoutly, should be read as any other poem. We, however, feel tempted to ask if a poem and a dramatic poem are identical. His answer to the question as to how Shakespeare



should be studied seems to be an echo of G. Wilson Knight :  
"We start with so many lines of verse on a printed page which we read as we should read any other poem. We have to elucidate the meaning and to unravel ambiguities : We have to estimate the kind and quality of the imagery and determine the precise degree of evocation of particular figures ; we have to allow full weight to each work, exploring its 'tentacular roots' and to determine how it controls and is controlled by the rhythmic movement of the passage in which it occurs."

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